

New coach Anne Mastandrea is planning to bring a new outlook and optimism to the Glenbard North girls volleyball program.

The success of her first team, however, will depend primarily on several program veterans, including seven seniors.

"They did graduate a lot of seniors, but you're always going to graduate seniors in the program so it's now these girls' time to be the leaders," Mastandrea said. "I always say the seniors are going to take us where we want to go and we have high expectations in the program now. They're the leaders of the team and all we can do is try our best and let them take us there."

Significant improvement is among the first steps for the Panthers, who open Sept. 3 with a nonconference home match against Willowbrook. Their DuPage Valley Conference opener is Sept. 16 at Naperville Central.

This year's team features senior and fourth-year varsity player Nicole Tobison and four more varsity returnees, seniors Sarah Petzold and Sarah Peters and juniors Stephanie Cole and Emily Krohn. Other varsity members are seniors Angel Hernandez, Asia Kim, Paige Mishevich and Maria Perino, juniors Bridgette Carbon and Haley Wisner and sophomore Nicole Intal.

"Just this year being new and us overcoming some obstacles, I don't think our lineup will ever be set. It could always change," Mastandrea said. "We coach it day by day. I'll assess the situation. We have some depth, but we're also kind of limited. We don't have that (depth) at each position as much as a coach's dream would be, but certainly we have the players that can succeed on the court."

In the team's scrimmage against the junior varsity Aug. 28, the Panthers' starting lineup was Tobison, Hernandez and Cole as outside hitters, Carbon and Krohn as middle hitters, Wisner at setter and Mishevich as the libero. All 11 healthy Panthers saw action over the two sets.

"I wanted to get every girl a chance to play and this week we had an injury so that kind of changed some things for us," Mastandrea said.

Tobison has experience, but she also is shifting from a middle to outside hitter this season. Tobison will lead the Panthers' experience on the outside with Cole, Hernandez and Petzold.

"(Tobison) is a huge leader on our team. She's an excellent kid," Mastandrea said. "She works hard on and off the court. She leads by example. She's really stepped up to the challenge because we moved her to the outside. She's a ball control player, too. Being a (former) middle, she passes great, she plays great defense. Really in certain situations, she's still learning, too."

Krohn will be a key threat in the middle along with Carbon and Kim, who may also contribute on the outside. As for now, the Panthers will run a one-setter offense with Wisner every rotation because Perino, their other setter, injured her foot during the preseason.

"(Krohn is) a strong middle," Mastandrea said. "I thought that Stephanie Cole played really well (in the scrimmage). She's a player that can really have a high ceiling for us and do a great job."

Mishevich is starting out the season as the libero, but Peters and Intal also are defensive specialists. During her playing days, Mastandrea was a four-year libero at Purdue University after being a starting defensive specialist for Downers Grove South's last state championship team in 2002 in then-Class AA.

"I think (libero is) another position where we're constantly trying to train kids to reach my high level of defensive expectations. It's a tough position to fill when your coach was a libero. (But) I think Paige is doing a great job," Mastandrea said. "We have a lot of (defensive specialists) in the program and when we started our training they were all kind of even."

Mastandrea said the Panthers could try several lineups during the Willowbrook Invite Sept. 5-6, where they will play five matches.

"We'll probably try different things, but I'm taking it one game at a time," Mastandrea said. "We'll re-asses it (after our scrimmage). We'll look at it again after the Willowbrook game and after (the invite), we'll look at it again."