

BIG TEN MEDIA DAYS

MONDAY, AUG. 5 - TUESDAY, AUG. 6

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Previewing the 2024 Minnesota Golden Gophers

- Minnesota is gearing up for its 53rd volleyball season in program history in 2024. The Golden Gophers will be looking to make their 10th consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance. They've missed the postseason just once (2014) since 1999.
- In 2023, the 'U' finished 17-13 (12-8 B1G) and went to the NCAA Tournament's Round of 32. The Gophers won an NCAA Tournament match for the ninth straight season and finished fifth in the conference standings in year one under head coach Keegan Cook. The program has made 24 of the last 25 NCAA Tournaments and has had 28 straight winning seasons, dating back to 1995. The Gophers have won 10-or-more Big Ten games in every season except for one dating back to 1999. The program has finished in the top five of the Big Ten standings every year since 2015.
- The Gophers had a streak of eight straight Sweet 16 or better finishes dating back to 2015 broken last season.
- Minnesota returns five starters and 11 letterwinners from last year's team, including a pair of 2023 Second Team All-Big Ten selections in opposite Lydia Grote and setter Melani Shaffmaster. Outside McKenna Wucherer returns for her junior year after leading the team in kills (3.24 kps) in 2023. She was named AVCA All-Region and the MVP of the Big Ten/Big 12 Challenge. Phoebe Awoleye (1.34 bps, team-high) returns for her fifth season in 2024 after a standout 2023.
- The Gophers brought in five newcomers this season, including three transfers and two true freshmen. Olivia (outside/opposite) and Stella (setter) are the two rookie additions, and they hail from Plymouth, Minn. The duo helped Minnetonka High School win three straight state titles from 2021-23.
- Alex Acevedo (outside) and Kate Thibault (DS/libero) transferred in from Oregon and will add competition and depth at their positions. Middle blocker Kali Engeman (Excelsior, Minn.) comes from Ga. Tech, where she has two years left of eligibility. She'll help anchor the middle blocker positions with Phoebe Awoleye and sophomore Calissa Minatee.
- Five of Minnesota's 2024 non-conference opponents made the 2023 NCAA Tournament. Texas, who they play in game two, won its second straight national title in 2023. The Gophers open with Stanford, who made the 2023 Elite Eight.
- Sophomore Zeynep Palabiyik, an Istanbul, Turkey native, is expected to compete for the libero spot with transfer Kate Thibault and senior Skylar Gray. Palabiyik played in 20 matches last year, totaling 1.12 digs, 0.28 assists and 0.13 aces per set.

**KEEGAN COOK**ST. MARY'S, 2007 | PLEASANTON, CALIF.
2ND SEASON**Career Path:**

- Hired at Minnesota on Dec. 12, 2022
- Spent eight seasons as the head coach at Washington (2015-22)
- Spent 2013 and 2014 seasons as an assistant at Washington
- Promoted to head coach at UW when former head coach Jim McLaughlin left for Notre Dame
- Before Washington, he was an assistant from 2007-12 at his alma mater, St. Mary's

Accolades and Accomplishments:

- 215-68 (.760) career record (17-13, 12-8 B1G at Minnesota)
- 198-56 (.780) record as a head coach at UW (107-33 in Pac-12 play)
- Nine NCAA Tournament appearances
- Six Sweet 16 appearances
- Four Elite Eight appearances
- One Final Four appearance (2020-21)
- Four Pac-12 Regular Season Championships; 2020-21 Pac-12 Coach of the Year
- 37 All-Pac 12 Selections; Four All-Big Ten Honorees
- 19 All-America honors (12 individuals)
- Coached one Pac-12 Player of the Year and two Pac-12 Setters of the Year
- In 2018, Cook led the U.S. Junior Women's National Team to compete in the NORCECA Championships in Mexico
- In the summer of 2022, Cook was an assistant on the U.S. Girls U19 Team that won gold at the Pan American Cup. He was the head coach for the U19 Team in both 2023 and 2024 that won the gold medal at the Pan American Cup.

Personal:

- Has a two-year-old son, Oliver, and a two-month-old son, Finley, with his wife, Sarah.



LYDIA GROTE

REDSHIRT SENIOR | OPPOSITE
BURBANK, CALIF. | JOHN BURROUGHS | CALIFORNIA

Accolades and Accomplishments:

- All-Big Ten Second Team (2023)
- All-Utah Valley Tournament Team (2022)
- AVCA All-North Region (2023)
- Diet Coke Classic All-Tournament Team (2023)
- USA Volleyball National Team Open Program Invitee (2021)
- Pac-12 All-Freshman Team (2020-21)
- Played in all 30 matches (106 sets) in 2023, averaging 2.68 kills (.245), 1.03 digs, 0.79 blocks and 0.31 aces per set.
- Totalled 15 10+ kill matches (one 20+) and three 10+ dig matches.

Get to Know:

- The daughter of Laurie and Paul Grote, her sister, Marin, played volleyball at Washington for Keegan Cook.
- Fav. Food: Steak. Fun Fact: Played outside, right-side and middle all in the same game at Cal.
- Played the first three years of her career at California before transferring to Minnesota in 2023.
- Originally born in Virginia but moved to California when she was young, which is where she grew up.
- Off the court, she's very into music. Whether it's researching music, music history or theory, or playing music.
- Also loves playing beach volleyball and just being outdoors.
- Biggest inspiration is her sister, Marin.



MCKENNA WUCHERER

JUNIOR | OUTSIDE
BROOKFIELD, WIS. | BROOKFIELD CENTRAL H.S.

Accolades and Accomplishments:

- Academic All-Big Ten (2023)
- AVCA All-North Region Honorable Mention (2022; 2023)
- Big Ten All-Freshman Team (2022)
- Big Ten Distinguished Scholar (2023-24)
- Big Ten/Big 12 Challenge MVP (2023)
- Big Ten/Big 12 Challenge All-Tournament (2023)
- CSC Academic All-District (2023)
- Diet Coke Classic All-Tournament Team (2023)
- U21 Team USA Norceca Pan-Am Cup Gold Medalist (May 2023)
- Played in all 30 matches in 2023, averaging a team-best 3.24 kills per set. In 2022, ranked second on team with 2.73 kps.

Get to Know:

- A 2021 AVCA First Team All-American and Wisconsin Gatorade Player of the Year, she was the No. 1 overall recruit in 2022.
- Has two older sisters, Miranda and Abby. Miranda played at NKU then at Minnesota in 2022 during her fifth year.
- Says her dad, Greg, and her sisters are her biggest inspirations in life.
- Off the court, loves to go to sporting events, do puzzles, workout, hang with family. Fav teams are Bucks, Brewers, Packers.
- Fun fact: competed in track in high school and won her sectional in the high jump.
- Looking forward to competing at Fiserv Forum in her hometown to open the 2024 season.