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2025

FALL

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES



Jamanni Cruz returns at wide receiver after leading the team in receptions and receiving yards last fall.



PRESS FILE PHOTOS

Senior Jordan Tocci-Wachter, (33) a three-year starter on defense, will be the Falcons' primary running back this fall.

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Taking the next step

Falcon football team hopes to build upon last year's season

BY MIKE HAINES
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It's been less than a year since the Salisbury High School football team had the best season the program has seen in over a decade.

But this year's team doesn't want to dwell on past success. The Falcons want to build on last year's 4-6 season rather than admire it.

"Our team slogan this year is 'the next step,'" said second-year head coach Kevin DiZenzo. "We feel that 4-6 this season will be unacceptable. We're accepting of the reality that we're going to compete each week as a competitive football program that is going to be a contender. Every single week we feel we can compete. I

feel that difference from the kids. We're not looking past anyone, but I can feel the energy and the confidence that we belong. The kids named the slogan 'the next step.' What we mean by that is we want to leave 4-6 behind."

The Falcons graduated their best-known player in running back/linebacker Jason St.

Leger, along with their starting quarterback and several other key players. But they bring back three starting offensive linemen with plenty of experience in seniors Elijah Garriga, Griffin Lakics and Sam Krauss, who will block for senior running back Jordan Tocci-Wachter.

See **FOOTBALL** on

Page 11



PRESS FILE PHOTOS

Salisbury's Meredith Kelley defends a Lehigh player during a game last fall. Kelly is part of a large group of returning players who played on last year's league and district runner-up team.



Kendra Morgan



Gwyn DeFazio

Falcon field hockey wants to 'level up'

BY CHUCK HIXSON
SPECIAL TO THE PRESS

When the 2025 version of the Salisbury field hockey team hits the field for the first time it will be jumping right into the heat of competition.

The season opened last Tuesday against Northwestern Lehigh, the team that defeated the Falcons for the Colonial League championship last season.

Falcon head coach Jane Brennan is excited about the upcoming season as the team looks to level up from its runner-up status in both leagues and districts last year.

"One of the biggest things we stressed this preseason is that we want them to level up," said Brennan, who starts her ninth season as the Salisbury field hockey coach. "Whatever they can do individually will help us to



Sarah Beckage tries to make a play in front of the net during a 2024 game against Palmerton.

level up as a team. This is a team-wide thing and we're going to level up as coaches. We're all leveling up for this thing because we know that after last season teams are going to look at us

differently, but we're ready for it."

One thing the Lady Falcons have going for them is that they lost only two players – Lauren Kushma and Maya Afif – to graduation.

It doesn't help that Kushma was the team's leading goal scorer and that Afif was one of the toughest players in front of the goal for Salisbury.

On the upside, the team returns six senior

players who figure to provide experience and leadership for the squad.

Kutztown University commit Gwyn DeFazio scored 22 goals and 19 assists last season and is a leader on both offense and defense.

Kendra Morgan combines athleticism and an aggressive style of play on offense and could be poised for a big season.

Sarah Beckage gives Salisbury the type of tough player in front of the goal that Afif provided last season and has a scrappiness that Brennan loves.

Defensively, in addition to the presence of DeFazio, Meredith Kelley started every game last season and has the communication skills that defenses need to be effective, while Emma Yakaitis provides speed to the defensive unit.

Goalie Caroline Gedney came up big last season and had 12 shutouts

as a junior.

With an experienced defensive group of players, scoring against the Lady Falcons won't come easily.

"We have a lot of girls who have been playing together for years, and they have a high IQ for the game and are unselfish," said Brennan. "Those types of players give a team leadership and the communication between them and the younger players has been great. That's something that really has to develop on its own. You can do things to help it along but either the players like each other and form friendships that carry over into teamwork or they don't."

Juniors Ellie Schneider and Katie Carbone, who both excel at getting the ball to the offensive zone well, return to the midfield for Salisbury. See **HOCKEY** on Page A9



PRESS FILE PHOTOS

Julian Makhoul heads into his second season as a soccer goal keeper in 2025.



Salisbury's Bradley Lopez puts a move on a defender during a game last season.

Boys soccer will have more depth this season

BY CHUCK HIXSON
special to the press

A year ago, Barry Frick was making the move from being an assistant boys soccer coach for seven seasons at Salisbury High School to taking over the program.

He inherited a team that was just 5-7 in the Colonial League and to make things even more difficult, he lost 10 seniors from that team, which hit the team's offense especially hard and took away the team's starting goalie.

Last season's team finished 3-14 overall and 1-13 in the Colonial League.

The Falcons lost four games by one goal and two more games by just

two goals in 2024 as crucial mistakes seemed to come at the worst times.

Coming into this season, Frick lost six more players to graduation, including top scorer Josh Hudak. Still, Frick has optimism for the upcoming season.

Last season, Julian Makhoul had two weeks of soccer experience when he opened the season as the team's emergency goalie.

It turned out that the sophomore learned the basics of playing in goal quickly but just lacked some of the finer points he needed to stop some goals. With a year of on-the-job training, Makhoul returns as the Falcons' goalie.

"Julian did a nice job for us last year and

I think he learned a lot and really has worked to be a better goalie," said Frick. "It was a tough situation for him to step into and he embraced the challenge and has been a big part of the team, so I think he's going to be a key for us this season."

The 2025 version of Salisbury soccer also features more depth than the team did coming into Frick's first season.

"We had pretty low numbers last season, but had a better turnout this year and found some good players who will be able to give us some depth that we didn't have last year," said Frick. "That hurt us at times when we had to make substitutions.

We'll be in much better shape as far as depth this season than we were a year ago."

Senior Christian Marinos scored a career-high seven goals as a junior and returns for the Salisbury offense. Fellow seniors Bradley Lopez, Jude Fitzgerald, Efstratios Hiotis, Gerrit Kloosterman, and Nick Kannan return looking to give Salisbury experience.

"We have a good group of seniors, and we are looking to them to really anchor the team and provide leadership this season," said Frick.

Along with Makhoul, the junior class provides players Jeandy Lantigua Batista, Edward Ballek, Thomas Pojanowski, Brian Lopez

and Kale Leayman.

"We have some very young players who are going to get some time on the field this season as well," said Frick. "And we are looking forward to seeing them develop because they have worked really hard for us."

"We are going to need them to step up for us this season and we believe that we can count on them to do that."

Another difference coming into this season is the addition of a fitness program designed by St. Luke's Hospital. The team started working on a specially designed program last November in preparation for the upcoming season.

"We have them in at

least a couple of times per week and they put them through weight lifting, stretching, flexibility, and other aspects of fitness," said Frick. "We worked very heavily on that and ran a summer league team and over the summer we gathered up as many players who weren't playing other sports and had fitness workouts at the high school."

Frick has been impressed with the work that his players have put in as they prepare for the season and believes that it will pay off for them. He also hopes that with more experience and depth, the team can cut down on the costly mistakes that cost it wins last season.

SHS golf team eyes late-season matches

BY MIKE HAINES
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The high school golf season in Pennsylvania is unique in a couple ways when compared to other sports.

First, golf has by far the shortest regular season, which began for Salisbury on Aug. 7 and will end just over a month later on Sept. 8.

Second, the season starts weeks before students head back to start the new school year.

For small schools like Salisbury, fielding a line up in the early part of the season can be challenging. Falcon head coach Mike Pannella has 11 players on

his roster, but most of them play other sports and some had vacations planned in August.

The team played the first two weeks of matches without having its entire roster available for any match.

“I have some really good players,” Pannella said. “We have a decent team if we all show up. We’ve got people on vacation the first two weeks. I haven’t really haven’t had the whole team until last Tuesday (Aug. 19).”

The Falcons went 4-7 last year but graduated six players from that team, including the team’s first District 11

Championship qualifier in several years in Owen Fogel.

Leading the line up this season are junior Jackson Skeans and freshman Chase Yakaitis, who are both averaging around 75 through the early part of the season. Senior Aiden Smarch is right behind them as the team’s No. 3 player this season.

Smarch is one of three seniors who are four-year varsity golfers, along with Markus Jones and Steven Lozada.

Junior Hunter Kotarski rounds out a top six that who are expected to

See **GOLF** on Page A10



Junior Jackson Skeans will play at the top of Salisbury’s golf team line up this season and is one of several Falcons who expect to qualify for postseason play.

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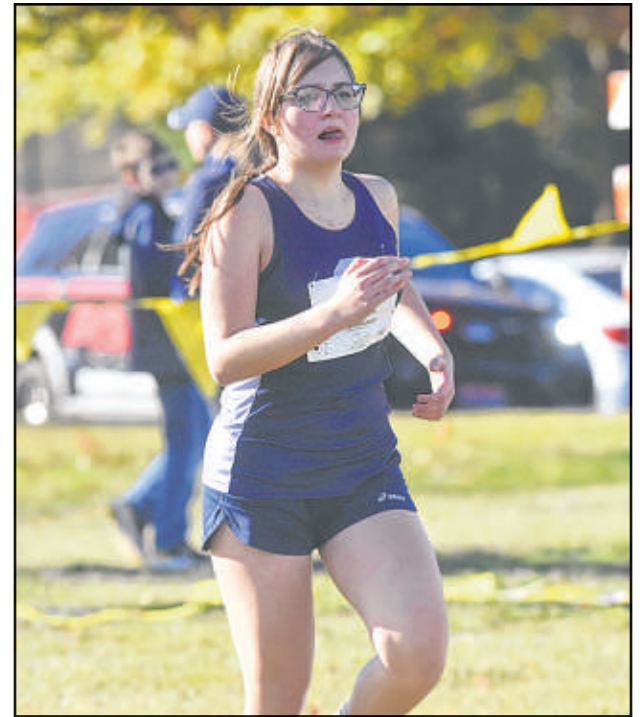




Emerson Juhasz



Samantha Conrad



Soledad Lausch

Salisbury XC will have full girls line up

BY MIKE HAINES
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Building up a high school athletic program often requires one step back for every two steps forward.

This year's Salisbury cross country has taken a step in the right

direction as it will see its first full girls team in several year. The Falcons also have a middle school program that will eventually supply the varsity team with a bigger roster.

On the down side, for the first time in a long time the Falcon boys

team is likely not to have enough runners to score as a team. The good news is three runners from last year's team are back this season and one newcomer will make the team just one short of a five-runner line up.

"Once the school year starts we'll have a pret-

ty good size girls team," said Salisbury head coach Annie Purtell. "We always have had a strong boys team and only three girls. Now we have more girls than boys."

The Falcons most experienced runner will lead the boys team in

senior Emerson Juhasz, who ran as one of the team's top two last year along with graduate Gregory Tenzer.

"We still have Emerson, so I'm happy about that," said Purtell. "He's been doing really well. He did really well in track and medaled in the

4x800 relay. I think that helps his confidence. He's been running well in practice. It's early, but once they start getting into shape I'm sure it will be great."

Along with Tenzer, the graduated Cameron

See **RUN** on Page A10

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PRESS FILE PHOTOS

Maddie Reis is one of several returning seniors on this year's Salisbury girls soccer team.



Kaitlyn Neuhs



Amy Cadet

SHS girls soccer's goal is to score more of them in 2025

BY CHUCK HIXSON
special to the press

Salisbury girls soccer head coach Rick Babyak has one request for the 2025 season: score goals.

His team struggled to score last season. In its first scrimmage this summer the team fought to a 0-0 tie with Liberty, which impressed the coach defensively, but left him a little concerned about the offensive outlook for the team.

"It's a confidence thing," said Babyak, who enters his 13th season as the team's head coach. "It's getting ourselves to the point where we take risks when we're in the offensive end and get more shots on goal. Just generate more shots and they'll start to go in."

"We have players that can score, so I know it will happen if we just de-

"We have players that can score, so I know it will happen if we just develop that confidence."

Salisbury girls soccer head coach
RICK BABYAK

velop that confidence."

As for young players who could make an impact offensively for Salisbury, Babyak pointed to Molly Foley, Carly Klein, and Lila Rose.

"Molly is probably going to be playing up top for us and Carly is primarily a midfielder, but I've been using her in a lot of different ways," said Babyak. "Lila is a good outside midfielder, and there are probably some that I'm forgetting but those three are the ones that come to mind first. Plus, there can always be that player that steps forward as the season progresses."

In goal, junior Kacie Kaough returns to her starting job and is poised to put together an even stronger season than in her sophomore season for Salisbury. Kaough will also benefit from the addition of Cam Platt, who is working as a coach for Babyak to help with coaching the goalies.

"She has really stepped up her game," Babyak noted. "She really did a nice job against Liberty, so I'm expecting good things from her."

With a season of varsity soccer experience, Kaough helps solidify an already established defensive unit for Salis-

bury. Autumn Evans, Maddie Reis, Sam Conrad, Kaitlyn Neuhs, Amy Cadet, and Bree Hand are all seniors and play either on defense or as a defensive midfielder for the Falcons.

One scenario that has been playing out in practice has been that younger players are coming in with a fresh attitude and look to show they belong, which Babyak loves to see.

"It really has elevated all of us," said Babyak. "What's going on here is that we have young players who are stepping in and have played well early on. It's really pushing the rest of us and has helped to develop."

Following up on an 0-12-2 season in 2024 means that the Lady Falcons have a lot of work to do. The added experience of older players coupled with the arrival



Autumn Evans

of younger players who look ready to contribute makes for optimism.

The performance early in practice and in their scrimmage against Liberty bodes well for the upcoming season.

"I'm encouraged. I

like the work that we're putting in and I think that we are making progress," said Babyak. "Now, it's just a matter of taking that onto the field for the season and seeing how we continue to grow."



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Girls tennis sees jump in numbers

BY MIKE HAINES
mhaines@tnonline.com

After two seasons without a full line up, the Salisbury girls tennis team is whole once again.

Two of the players from last year's roster of three return this year, along with six new players who will allow the Falcons to field a full line up of three singles players and two doubles teams.

Former Salisbury field hockey head coach Rachel Legath took the reigns of the girls tennis program this year after former head coach Gregg Laub's retirement.

"The girls are so fun," said Legath. "They're so energetic. They're having so much fun together."

"There's not a whole lot of expectations for the new girls who never

picked up a racquet before because there were only two girls last year."

Senior Jaylene Vazquez returns to the team after playing in the top singles position last year. She'll lead the line up again this fall with sisters Kacie Kaough (junior) and Kamryn Kaough (freshman) in the second and third singles positions, respectively.

Freshman Brinlee Neitz and junior Annisa Slack will form one doubles team for Salisbury, while returning junior Ariana Cachia, junior McKenna Jones and Katya Hunter will vie for spots on the second doubles team.

The line up could shift on any given day as many of the players are participating in several sports or activities during the fall season.

"I'm sharing with

field hockey, soccer and band," said Lagath.

After 10 years as a Falcon field hockey coach, Lagath stepped away from coaching to start a family. An emotional support interventionist at Salisbury High School, she's been active in youth sports over the past few years and decided to get back into the varsity ranks this season.

"To get back into things with the high school kids is really cool for me," said Lagath, who played field hockey and soccer in high school. "My experience in tennis is minimal, but I'm loving it. The girls are so fun. They're so energetic. They're having so much fun together."

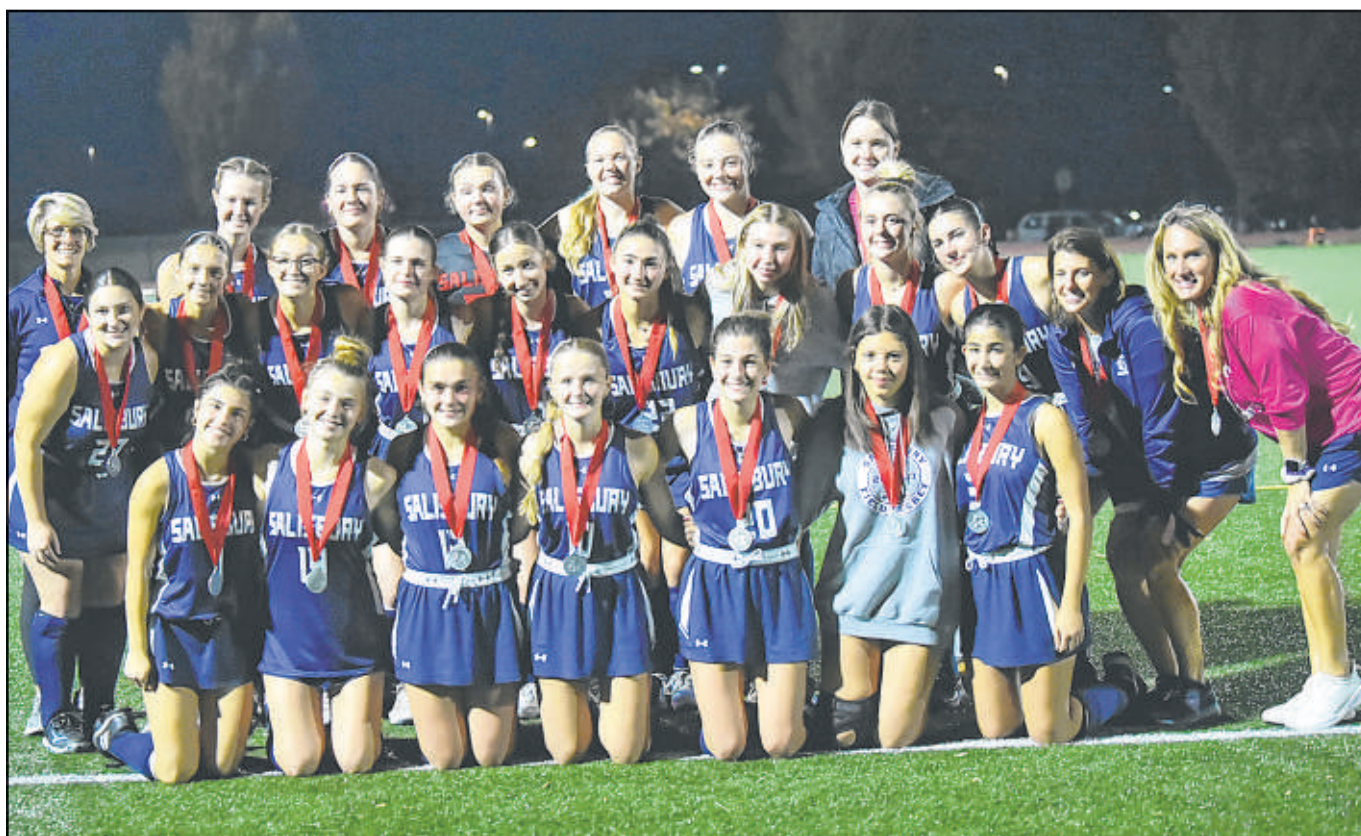
"I'm new to them. I'm new to the coaching aspect of tennis. We're all just winging it and having fun together."



PRESS FILE PHOTO

Senior Jaylene Vazquez will play at the top of Salisbury's singles line up.

The Salisbury field hockey team earned silver medals in both the Colonial League and District 11 playoffs in 2024. Just two seniors graduated from that team.



HOCKEY

Continued from page A3

Schneider has great field hockey instincts and Carbone provides some toughness in the midfield. Ella Morgans can move from midfield to defense and brings speed and a strong passing game to the mix.

The sophomore class is represented by midfielder Ryley Shoemaker and Anna Grubb and Brennan believes both will be contributing to the team.

"Our goal is not only to get back to the league and district championships, but to level up and become champions," said Brennan. "That's what this whole idea is about. We have to do the things that it takes to make that next step."

GOLF

Continued from page A5
help the team score in matches this year.

Senior Aiden Bonser, sophomores Casey Wells, Logan Kao and Tanner Kuder, and freshman Ryan Spisszak will also be called on to play in matches in 2025.

Pannella is hoping at least five of his top six, if not all of them, qualify for this year's Colonial League Championships and expects Skeans, Yakaitis and Smarch to earn spots in the district qualifier.

The Falcons also had to battle through a diffi-

cult early-season schedule this season. Their first five opponents – Saucon Valley, Palmyra, Notre Dame (Green Pond), Northwestern and Moravian Academy – are a combined 18-4 this season and are five of the top six teams in the Colonial League standings.

“Our schedule, we play all the hard teams in the front,” said Pannella, who expects his team to rebound in the final two weeks after an 0-5 start. “We could possibly end up with four or five wins in the last two weeks.”



Shelby Tenzer



Lydia Fogel

RUN

Continued from page A6

Kubinsky and Joshua Orach from last year's team that went 5-25 in Colonial League dual meets.

The rest of this year's boys roster includes re-

turning seniors Rafael Carpo and Riley Nemitz, along with sophomore newcomer Isaac Mokua and freshmen Dean Cachia and Kaiden Conrad.

This year's girls team will be led by returning seniors Samantha Conrad and Soledad Lausch. Juniors Lydia Fogel and

Shelby Tenzer are also back with the team.

Freshman Annabella Tavares is a newcomer to the girls roster.

With two weeks before the season started the girls team already had enough runners to score in meets. Purtell, who was part of the Fal-

cons' track and field coaching staff in spring, recruited some athletes from that team and hopes a few more might join the team early in the season.

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PRESS FILE PHOTOS

Sam Krauss (54) is a four-year starter on both sides of the ball.



Dominic Natosi (5) breaks up a pass last season against state champ Northwestern Lehigh.



AJ Maren picked off eight passes last season and will play both receiver and safety in 2025.

FOOTBALL

Continued from page A2

and quarterback Keaton Frye.

"It all starts from there," said Tocci Wachter. "From the passing game to the running game to defensively. The line is the most important part of football so its amazing that our linemen are out there putting in the work everyday."

Krauss heads into his fourth season as a starter on both sides of the ball. Laikics, who was listed at 6-5, 340 on last year's roster, returns and moves to guard. Garigga is in his third year as the starter at center.

"Everything we do is hinging on those guys," said DiZenzo. "They will be in the rotation on the defensive line. They're big. They're strong and they're faster than they were [last season]."

Tocci-Wachter, who was third on last year's running back depth chart behind St. Leger and Derek Trinidad, has been a defensive starter for three seasons and will now play full time on both sides of the ball.

St. Leger ran for 662 yards and nine touchdowns last season, to go

along with 119 receiving yards and two receiving scores. He also completed four of five pass attempts for 186 yards and two touchdowns.

Tocci-Wachter got 34 carries last season and averaged 6.0 yards per carry with one touchdown run.

"A lot of people don't realize we have another really good running back in our stable," said DiZenzo. "He was our Will linebacker. He led the defensive in tackles, two interceptions, multiple forced fumbles. He was a play maker at the Will linebacker position. Now with him starting in the offensive backfield, that's going to be awesome."

Full back Jacob Watson, who is on his way back from an injury, will clear the way for Tocci-Wachter when he's ready to go.

Frye takes over for graduate Andrew Lucas (51-for-123, 705 yards, 7 TD) and behind an improved offensive line could help the Falcons' expand their passing game this season.

"We have to protect the quarterback," said DiZenzo. "Some of the stuff we're going to be playing is going to help that. We have to put our trust in the experienced



Grayson Gnall returns as a defensive starter and will also play full back for the Falcons this season.

guys on the offensive line. That is the biggest thing we've worked on this offseason."

Frye, who went 2-for-2 passing for 52 yards last season, will have one of the league's best receivers at his disposal this year in Jamanni Cruz.

"I believe him to be the best wide receiver in this league," said DiZenzo.

Cruz (13 receptions, 315 yards, 3 TD) led the team in catches and receiving yards and was tied for the most touchdown receptions last year.

"We're excited to get back to the Friday night atmosphere and show

everybody what we've been working on," said Cruz. "We have a lot more confidence, but I still feel like we didn't prove anything yet. We're a better football team than 4-6."

Frye echoed those sentiments.

"We're pretty excited," he said. "We want to build off what we did last year. We want to do better than 4-6. We still have a lot of work to do. Nothing is going to be guaranteed. We all have to work hard for it. And we all have been working hard for it."

AJ Moren, who picked off a program-record eight passes last

season, will also line up as a receiver this season, along with Jadiel Gonzalez and Jeremiah Bell.

The Falcon defense will start with those same three returning seniors on the front line in Krauss, Lakics and Garigga. Grayson Gnall and Isaac Lakics will also be part the of rotation up front on defense.

Tocci-Wachter, Watson and Jaden Claudio will lead the linebacking unit.

Tocci-Wachter led the team with 91 total tackles last year, including 37 solo stops. Watson made 56 tackles (24 solo) and Claudio was in on 30 tackles and had four tackles for loss, which second on the team behind St. Leger.

Moren, who played his first season of football as a sophomore in 2024, returns at safety along with Bell. Dominic Natosi returns at corner back and will play across from Gonzalez with Cruz also part of the rotation in the defensive backfield.

The Falcons entered the 2024 season coming off just two wins in the past three regular seasons.

"Not matter how excited we could be, how locked in we could be,

we were a winless program and that has an effect," said DiZenzo. "This roster, this group, these are the guys who put in the work. Most of these guys bled for four wins. Most of these guys bled to be in every game [last season]."

The second-year head coach deserves a good deal of credit for last season's turnaround, even if he isn't looking for it.

"It's not just the new coach, no," he said. "It's the kids. It the assistant coaching staff. It's the support they're getting from the community."

DiZenzo is pleased that youth football is back in Salisbury and he's part of that program helping young Falcons learn the game.

"We now have a new youth program, Salisbury Youth Football," he said. "In my opinion it is only going to grow. The stable of coaches is strong. We are all on the same page. We have the same mission."

The Falcons started the season at Panther Valley last Friday and will host Notre Dame (Green Pond) this Friday night at 7 p.m. After that they'll head to Wilson for a Saturday game on Sept. 6 before hosting Catasauqua Friday, Sept. 12.

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