

The Healdsburg Tribune

Badminton team turns into a program

BY STAN BISCHOF - April 29, 2026



STRIDER Alex Francis of the HHS badminton team practices his lunge return at Smith Robinson Gym last month. He's been a strong player in both singles and doubles matches this year. (Photos by Michael Lucid)

Even though badminton is a relatively new sport for Healdsburg High, the team is poised to bring home its first pennant when it wins its North Bay League Redwood Division title. Last week the Healdsburg High badminton team cemented an unassailable lead in the league, with wins against rivals Windsor and Roseland University Prep. With only one game left to play, Thursday against Elsie Allen, the pennant is guaranteed.

Badminton at HHS only began in 2017. Coaches Ever Flores and Vincenta Vega did an excellent job of recruiting a team and getting them started. After a couple of years I was asked to replace them, and I agreed largely due to the obvious enthusiasm of the players.



JUMP SHOT Luiz Lopez, one of the underclass players who is well positioned to break out next year.

Going in I was quite up-front about expectations, in particular that it would take maybe five years to build a strong team. As a coach my focus has been on the fundamentals, such as footwork, that are critical to good badminton. Any of the players will know what my reminders of “right foot!” mean, and they are learning when to “swing!” and when to “push!” Yet as I tell them, playing well comes first – winning is secondary.

This year, due to their hard work, we have a championship team and are bringing home Healdsburg badminton’s first league pennant. Not only that but given the excellent recruiting led by senior team member Edgar Navarro, we have the beginning of a true badminton program and not just a team.

The ideal size for a badminton program in our league is about three dozen players. Our varsity squad requires about a dozen team members and those tend to be third- and fourth-year players. Similarly our JV needs another dozen, and after that we need a group of developing players to move up as their skills improve.

In the past we have had small teams that have been very individually strong but we have not had the incoming talent to replace them as they graduated. This year we have had only six returning players but a very healthy 29 new freshmen and sophomores.



SPREADEAGLE Senior Caitlyn Parker remains undefeated for the past two years in singles play.

Our team has been well led by seniors Caitlyn Parker, undefeated for two years in singles; Alex Francis, strong in both singles and doubles; Edgar Navarro, a very smart tactical player; and Alexa Cervantes, doubles specialist. Next year we will have just one experienced player, fourth-year Bryanna Cortez Sierra, to anchor the team. But we also have some very promising new players such as freshmen Carrie Osborne, Luis Lopez and Alexandra Jensen, who have shown themselves quite capable of varsity play.

Now that we have sufficient incoming talent to create future strong teams I

can truly say we have transitioned from a team to a program.

I am really looking forward to watching these players improve in the coming years. Special thanks this year to my assistant, Kai Lau, who has helped immensely running our matches and keeping us organized.

Stan Bischof is the Healdsburg High badminton coach. Learn more at worldbadminton.com.

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