

EIGHT STUDENT-ATHLETES JOIN NORTHERN STATE SOCCER FOR 2026

Aberdeen, S.D. – Northern State University head soccer coach Bob Casper announced today the addition of eight student-athletes to the fall 2026 Wolves roster. Claire Backstrom (Sioux Falls, S.D.), Sarah Helderop (Mandan, N.D.), Jasmine Jost (Pierre, S.D.), Makenna Lyons (Prior Lake, Minn.), Ava Nelson (Plymouth, Minn.), Addie Ott (Waverly, Iowa), Anaka Ott (Waverly, Iowa), and Chloe Wallhead (Laramie, Wyo.) will join NSU as freshman next fall.



Claire Backstrom – D, 5-7, Sioux Falls, S.D. / Harrisburg HS

Claire Backstrom is a defender out of Harrisburg High School. She is a 2-year starter and team captain for the Tigers under the direction of head coach Kami Miller. Harrisburg has won three straight conference championships and four straight South Dakota Class AA State Championships. Backstrom is a 2-time all-conference selection and 2-time all-state honoree. In addition, she is a member of the DASC and Tempo Soccer Clubs participating in the US Club Midwest Regionals and USYSA Presidents Cup. She is the daughter of Eric and Shannon Backstrom.

Casper's Thoughts: "Claire is a great addition to our backline for the 2026 class. She has played in both a 3-back and 4-back system and excelled reading the game in both systems. She has a great work rate and does well challenging for the ball. Claire has the speed to lock down players who run in behind, and then she can also take space in the attack and find openings to start the attack. She plays with her head up while on the ball and works to make quality passes in the build-up. She also has Championship experience that will help continue our competitive environment in pursuit of an NSIC championship."



Sarah Helderop – F/MF, 5-4, Mandan, N.D. / Mandan HS

Sarah Helderop is a forward/midfielder out of Mandan High School. She is a 3-year starter and team captain for the Braves under the direction of head coach Aaron McElwee. In her first three seasons, Helderop tallied 73 goals and ten assists, including a career high 31 as a junior. She was named the North Dakota Gatorade Player of the Year as a junior and is a 3-time all-conference selection, 3-time all-state honoree, and 3-time state all-tournament team member. In addition, Helderop is an all-state selection with the Unite Soccer Coaches. She led the state of North Dakota in 2024 and 2025 as the top goal scorer and led the state in overall points last season. Finally, Helderop is a 2-time member of the Exact 11 All-America Watch List. She is the daughter of Randy and Kera Helderop.

Casper's Thoughts: "Sarah is a balance of grit and ability. She works hard and is a very physical player when needed. She can also use her touch and vision on the ball to open the defense and create goals. Whether she is taking tight angle shots or releases longer diagonal passes, Sarah is always a threat in the attack. Last season showed her ability to lead and see a team through to a State Championship, which is exactly the type of experiences we are looking for to help push our program forward. Sarah has been someone who we have had the chance to follow for a few years, so to culminate that time with her joining the Wolves is fantastic."



Jasmine Jost – MF, 5-3, Pierre, S.D. / T.F. Riggs HS

Jasmine Jost is a midfielder out of T.F. Riggs High School. She is a 5-year starter for the Governors under the direction of head coach Kira Swenson. Jost is both a first team all-state recipient and ESD All-Conference selection. She is a member of the Black Hills Rapids program that won nationals in 2025. She is the daughter of Adam and Katie Jost.

Casper's Thoughts: "Jasmine is yet another person who brings versatility to the team having played attacking roles, and even some defensive roles recently. She is committed to helping her teams any way possible. When we think about having team players who don't back down from a challenge, Jasmine fits that criteria perfectly. That mindset comes out when Jasmine gets on the ball and drives at defenders and ultimately creates many goalscoring moments. She comes from a great high school program led by one of our own NSU Wolves and has tested herself in a great club environment. We have known Jasmine for a long time now, and to have her put to paper to join the Wolves is exciting."



Makenna Lyons – D, 5-5, Prior Lake, Minn. / Prior Lake HS

Makenna Lyons is a defender out of Prior Lake High School. She is a starter and team captain for the Lakers under the direction of head coach Phil Walczak. In her final two seasons, Lyons tallied one goal and five assists. Her defense tallied nine shutouts in 2025 and Lyons earned all-conference honorable mention accolades. PLHS won the section 2AAA championship and placed third at the Minnesota State High School League Tournament. Lyons is a member of the Prior Lake Soccer Club (PLSC U18/U19 ECNL-RL), winning championships at the NPL Super Group League, Midwest Regional, and MN Cup. She is the daughter of Jeremy and Marchelle Lyons.

Casper's Thoughts: "One aspect of Makenna's game that jumps out is her intentness in defending. She can really focus in one-versus-one situations as a wing player, and quite often comes out of those situations with the ball. Her ability to regain possession and then start the counterattack is something that we look for from wide players. Makenna truly is an up-and-down player who flies up the wing to create crosses and scoring chance and then drop in quick. Her experience in a few different roles will fit in well with how we like to adjust and adapt our own team. She finished high school soccer on a high note and has had some great championship experience at the club level that will be a valuable addition."



Ava Nelson – GK, 5-9, Plymouth, Minn. / Southwest Christian HS

Ava Nelson is a goalkeeper out of Southwest Christian High School. She is a 3-year starter and team captain for the Stars under the direction of head coach Mark Anderson. As a senior, Nelson tallied a .346 goals against average and .936 save percentage. She recorded the most saves in the 6A Conference in 2025. Nelson is a 2-time all-conference honoree and 2-time all-state selection. SCHS won conference championships in 2023 and 2024, advancing to the MSHSL Tournament in 2024 and 2025. The Stars finished as the state runner-up this past season. She is the daughter of Kyle and Joy Nelson.

Casper's Thoughts: "Being able to add a goalkeeper with Ava's skill set is a great advantage for our team. She is strong controlling her box and does very well cutting out cross and handling all other high balls. She is a physical goalkeeper and commands the defensive third very well. In addition, Ava is very good with her feet and is a great asset in attack. She can keep possession going during build-up play but can also deliver a quality long pass to unlock the opposition. As a leader, Ava has a strong sense of teamwork and builds quality bonds with those around her. This is a key attribute of a goalkeeper who will need to lead and organize the team in front of her."



Addie Ott – D, 5-5, Waverly, Iowa / Waverly-Shell Rock HS

Addie Ott is a centerback out of Waverly-Shell Rock High School. She is a 4-year starter and team captain for the Go-Hawks under the direction of head coach Scott Schara. As a midfielder, Ott tallied 15 goals and 17 assists. She is a 3-time all-district selection, 3-time all-area team member, and 2-time all-state recipient. WSRHS has advanced to the state tournament in 2022, 2023, and 2024, recording a pair of runner-up finishes. Ott plays on the FC United Iowa our of Cedar Rapids and is a 3-time state champion and national champion. She is the daughter of Erika and Andy Ott.

Casper's Thoughts: "When we began looking at strengthening our backline, Addie was someone who jumped out at a person who can provide stability and aggressiveness. She reads the game very well and is composed on the ball. Her ability to see the field and move the ball to the open spaces when building up is a great asset. However, when needed, Addie can be very physical and create turnovers. She's a disciplined center back and will provide some great leadership in that role as her times goes on at Northern. Lastly, being a dual sport athlete who is competitive and has had championship level experiences will add to our culture."



Anaka Ott – MF, 5-4, Waverly, Iowa / Waverly-Shell Rock HS

Anaka Ott is a midfielder out of Waverly-Shell Rock High School. She is a 4-year starter and team captain for the Go-Hawks under the direction of head coach Scott Schara. Ott tallied 73 goals and 30 assists in her first three seasons, scoring a total of 178 points. She is a 4-time all-district selection, 2-time all-area pick, 2-time all-state honoree, 2-time all-tournament team member, and the 2025 all-tournament team captain. WSRHS has advanced to the state tournament in 2022, 2023, and 2024, recording a pair of runner-up finishes. Ott plays on the FC United Iowa our of Cedar Rapids and is a 3-time state champion and national champion. She is the daughter of Erika and Andy Ott.

Casper's Thoughts: "Anaka brings a well-rounded skill set as a midfielder player. She can check back deep to find the ball in attack if her team needs support, and then the next moment she can be higher up the field and turn a defender to breakdown the opposition in a dangerous moment. She sees the field well and knows where she wants to go with the ball before it arrives. Not only can Anaka go forward in attack, but she also does the gritty work in the midfield while defending. She uses her body well to separate a player from the ball. He strong work ethic and championship level experiences will positively impact Wolves Soccer."



Chloe Wallhead – F, 5-8, Laramie, Wyo. / Laramie HS

Chloe Wallhead is a forward out of Laramie High School. She is a 3-year starter for the Plainsmen under the direction of head coach Kim Whisenant. In 2024 and 2025 combined, Wallhead scored six goals and recorded five assists. She earned first team all-conference honors in 2025. LHS won the conference championship in the fall of 2024 with a 13-2-2 record. She is a member of the Arsenal Colorado out of Fort Collins, winning a state championship in 2023 and Presidents Cup in 2022. She is the daughter of Tristan and Leisa Wallhead.

Casper's Thoughts: "Chloe has always been a determined player who will drive through the toughest of challenges. She holds herself to a high standard and continues to grow as a player, whether that's through team training or going out and working on soccer with her sister. As a forward, Chloe has great Soccer IQ. She knows when to drive end line and find the gaps in the defense for a cross. Then, off the ball, Chloe finds the passing windows and places herself into dangerous positions to score. Her drive on the ball and ability to unbalance defenses will be a great addition to our team's attack. Having known Chloe from a young age, it's fantastic to see Chloe go from being a ball kid at college soccer games to being on the field for Wolves Soccer."