GRINNELL, Iowa – First-year Grinnell College volleyball coach Eric Ragan ’12 is excited for the upcoming campaign, and for good reason.

The Pioneers return three seniors, including All-Midwest Conference performer Margaret Giles ’18, from a team that qualified for the league tourney last fall. Giles, a setter, ranks fourth in program history with 1,863 assists. She also had 63 kills and 188 digs in 2016.

Sydney Vreecen ’18, who switched from libero to outside hitter, ranked fourth in the league in digs a year ago with 4.41 per set and was seventh in aces with 0.38 a set. Defensive specialist Deanna Taylor ’18 completes the senior trio after ranking among the team leaders with 2.31 digs per set.

“Margaret, Sydney and Deanna are going to see a lot of time on the court and will be important to our overall success,” said Ragan. “They’ve all had success in the past and their leadership will be key to how well we do.”

Returning juniors are Emma Willhardt ’19 (middle blocker), Nora Hill ’19 (outside hitter/right side hitter) and Sona Chulaki ’19 (defensive specialist). “Emma had been injured, but now is healthier than she has ever been at Grinnell,” said Ragan. “And Nora has improved so much in the last six months. She’s really worked hard and will be a factor for us.”

Willhardt led the Pioneers in blocks last season with 58 and also had 121 kills.

Sophomores include Madison Smith ’20 (defensive specialist) and Alissa Johnson ’20 (outside hitter). “Maddy has decided to switch positions, which will give us added depth in our defensive pool,” said Ragan. “That will come along with time and reps. We’re going to make mistakes early on, but it’ll pay dividends.”

Sophomore Kaylin Kuhn ’21 (outside hitter) and Olivia Jensen ’21 (middle blocker) are also on the roster. “We’ve got a really good young group in the back,” said Ragan. “That will come along with time and reps.”

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The talented first-year class includes Kaylin Kuhn ’21 (outside hitter), Olivia Jensen ’21 (middle blocker), Sophia Carbajal ’21 (middle blocker), Hannah Taylor ’21 (outside hitter) and Isabel Ambrusok ’21 (setter). “Kaylin and Olivia both came in playing at a super-high level in club ball and will be contributors right away,” said Ragan. “The remaining three first-years are all great additions, too. They all came in ready to work and improve.”

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Head Coach Eric Ragan

Eric Ragan ’12 was named volleyball coach at Grinnell College in the spring of 2017.
Ragan has plenty of volleyball coaching and administrative experience, serving as Director of Volleyball Operations at Loyola Marymount University in California prior to coming to Grinnell.
At Loyola Marymount, Ragan contributed to practice design, game plans and strategies, plus facilitated statistical analysis for the team. Prior to that, Ragan served as assistant volleyball coach at Bucknell University from 2014-16 where he helped the team double its win total and earn its best conference record in a decade.

Ragan also served as volunteer assistant coach at Loyola University in Chicago from 2013-14 and Grinnell during the 2012 season.
Additionally, he is co-founder and Director of Volleyball of Train Ugly, coordinating week-long volleyball and basketball camps for over 500 athletes and their club and school coaches.
Ragan majored in history at Grinnell and completed his master’s degree this year. While at Grinnell he enjoyed success with the Pioneers’ track and field team, earning All-Midwest Conference honors in the 400-meter hurdles, serving as team captain and collecting Academic All-Conference recognition.

Assistant Coach Katelyn Camp

Katelyn Camp joined the Grinnell volleyball coaching staff in 2017. During her high school career, she was a three-year varsity volleyball letter winner and was selected second team All-Conference. Additionally, she played for the IPVA club volleyball team year-round in Ankeny, Iowa, where they qualified and played at nationals her senior year.

She then was offered a scholarship to play at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, where she was the starting setter her freshman year. However, due to a back injury, she transferred to Iowa State where she received her bachelor’s degree in Kinesiology. During her time at Iowa State, she coached an eighth grade girls club volleyball team in Gilbert, Iowa, and played intramural volleyball.
She currently lives in Newton, Iowa with her family and is in the process of applying to graduate school programs.