

Redskin baseball team loses big class

By MIKE COURSON

Little River has established itself as one of the baseball powers in Class 2-1A. The Redskins have qualified for state in two of the past four seasons, playing for a state title in 2014. Last spring, the Redskins came up a game short of another state berth. With just three returning players from that 16-6 squad, Little River will have to fight to keep that reputation.

"We're a very young and inexperienced team," said Coach Terry Renken, back for an eighth season. "Thirteen players are out and they will all contribute in some form. I see this team getting better each week. The schedule will be very tough."

Gone are key play-

ers like Cordell Moore, Laramie Peters, Tyler Grant Harvey, and Tyler Karraker that made Little River feared offensively and on the mound.

Renken's three returners all have pitching experience. Senior Damien Martinez will split time in the outfield and on the mound. Junior Jeb Sauer will spend time in the infield and on the mound, and sophomore Levi Swenson will play a variety of positions to go along with his pitching duties.

Junior Levon Swenson and sophomore Peyton Harvey return as varsity letter winners from last year, and Renken expects sophomores Jordan Moffett and Bryce Sears to have an increased role in 2016.

Little River baseball 2016

March 29	@Inman
April 1	MOUNDRIDGE
April 5	HOME TRI
April 7	SEDGWICK
April 12	MOUNDRIDGE
April 14	@Ell-Saline
April 19	@Satanta
April 22	@Canton-Galva
April 26	BENNINGTON
April 29	@Ell-Saline
May 5	@Marion
May 10	ELLSWORTH
May 16-17	Regional
May 26-27	State

Little River softball 2016

April 5	LINCOLN
April 7	SEDGWICK
April 12	HOME TRI
April 15	NICKERSON
April 19	@Satanta
April 22	@Canton-Galva
April 26	ELLSWORTH
May 3	@Ellinwood
May 5	@Marion
May 16-17	Regional
May 26-27	State

Little River track 2016

April 5	@Remington
April 8	@Lyons
April 12	@Centre
April 19	@Moundridge
April 21	@Sterling
April 26	@Peabody
May 3	@Lyons
May 5	@Herington
May 12	WSL @Goessel
May 20	Regional
May 27-28	State @Wich. State

Ellinwood golf 2016

April 4	@Nickerson
April 7	@Hoisington
April 18	@Sterling
April 19	@Larned
April 21	HOME, 1 p.m.
May 2	@Salina (SES)
May 5	@Ellsworth
May 10	CPL @HOME
May 16	Regional TBA
May 24	State @Salina

EHS golf

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for them this year," he said. "They've both really improved over the summer and the first two or three weeks of practice. Fortunately, they don't need a whole lot of mechanical help. It's just fine-tuning a couple things then turning them loose and letting them do their thing."

Ewing and Sjogren will be joined by three freshmen in Myles Menges, Bryce Baker, and John Billinger. Alefs said his squad will likely not compete as a varsity squad for many of the meets but he may fill a complete roster at home meets on April 21 and May 10. Menges may get some varsity time in other meets.

Ellinwood will host the Central Prairie League meet on May 10, and Alefs is excited to have all those teams come to town.

"It's going to be interesting with the crisscrosses and the shorter course," he said. "It's fun we'll be able to host the league meet because I was a junior in 1996, we hosted a regional in Ellinwood. It will kind of be like a replay of having a regional meet in Ellinwood, it being a different kind of course. It will be interesting to see how the players react to it."

That 1996 season was a big one for Alefs. As a junior at EHS, he won the Class 3A individual state golf title that year. Growing up down the street from the golf course in Great Bend, Alefs began playing competitively around age six, and was part of Steve Gotsche's first junior golf program. After graduating from EHS, Alefs went on to play golf at Bethany College under Jon Daniels.

"He's probably one of the reasons I wanted to get into coaching," Alefs said. "With my grandpa (Jack Bowman) and my mom (Jackie Cook), that's kind of been bred into me. My golf coach at Bethany was a big reason I wanted to coach kids."

Alefs also played basketball for the Eagles and returned as an assistant coach for two years through 2012. As a first-time head coach, he wants his established players to continue their success but now has the role of keeping the program alive after they graduate. He hopes to host a summer clinic to get more young kids interested.

"I want to see the two seniors go out with a bang and hopefully have a successful year," he said. "We've talked about whether they want to continue their golfing careers and, if they do, trying to get them recruited by junior colleges or small colleges around the state."

"As far as the younger kids, we're looking for a solid building foundation for something to continue on. We don't want the program to go away so we're trying to draw as much interest as we can."

Lyons baseball

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pitcher and catcher, and sophomore Bryan Pina is expected to see some varsity time.

Kirkhart has many players penciled in as possibilities at second base, and the team has spent the first weeks of practice trying to secure a solid defense.

"Second base is where we're not locked in," Kirkhart said. "We have three or four guys still trying to be consistent. We have three or four outfielders we feel good about, it will just be who can we get into second base."

Kirkhart always preaches putting the ball in play. This year, with some much speed on the roster, that will be emphasized once again, especially since the Kansas City Royals proved small ball can win.

"They don't do it with home runs," Kirkhart said of the Royals. "We're not a home-run hitting team. They utilize their speed, they play small ball, they put the ball in play and make things happen, and they play good defense. We have the tools for all of that. Now it's just a matter of finding some consistent pitching."

"We need pitchers to get the mindset to go out and compete and win. That's what we lost last year with Grady, Mitchell, Jake, and even Dakota. When they took the mound, there was the confidence they could go out there and compete and get guys out. We have some talented pitchers – some guys who

can pitch – now it's just a matter of going out and throwing strikes and giving us a chance to make plays."

Winning the CKL is always a priority in Lyons. Last year, Larned won the title and took an 18-3 record to state. The Indians won a game and led Concordia 4-1 late in the semifinals but let it slip away. Because of rain delays, no consolation game was played. The Indians are expected to be the top competition in the CKL again as Isiah Perez and Evan Skelton return after shutting out opponents in the regular season last year.

"Our mindset is we play to win league," said Kirkhart. "We won league two years in a row. Last year, we tried to convince the kids now that they have a target on their back they have to be able to go out and play. We just slipped. Larned had a really good team last year and they've got most of those kids back. That's going to be the forerunner."

Several of this year's players did see Perez over the summer. They were able to scratch out an 8-run inning against the ace.

"Anything can happen," Kirkhart said. "It started with a base hit and an error. It started with the way the Royals play, capitalizing on opportunities. Once it gets going, you get the next guy up and all of a sudden you hit one in the gap."

Five seniors to lead LR girls

The Little River softball team is back for a third season and will again be led by Coach Erin Wohletz.

"We are fortunate to have five seniors leading our team this year and several incoming freshmen who will be able to fill some gaps for us," she said.

Seniors Sadie McBride and Emily Smyres will join freshmen Kylie Eller and Rylee Cunningham as pitchers this spring. Macy Schlatter returns behind the plate with experience and a leadership role.

Wohletz is expecting big things from junior Brenna Eller both in the outfield and at the plate.

The infield will also be rooted with some returning players.

"Our infield is very strong with several of the seniors, so we hope to be able to make some plays," Wohletz said. "The bats have been coming around the past few weeks of practice and we look forward to having base runners with opportunities to put some runs on the board."

"This is a great group of girls who have worked very hard the past three years to get to where we are this season. I'm hoping to see all of their hard work pay off and improve upon our record from last season."

Lady Lions

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and scored 20 runs. Sophomore Bailey Hollinger played 23 games as an infielder, finishing her inaugural varsity campaign with a .321 average, 19 runs, 17 RBIs, and six doubles.

With the three losses in the infield, Clark will have some moving around to do. Michaelis is expected to move from second base to catcher to fill the void left by Barker. Laura Pineda will likely move from third to shortstop when not pitching, and Jaime will move in from the infield when Pineda is throwing.

Senior Marisol Diaz may become a regular in the outfield after playing in just seven games with eight of-

ficial at bats last season, and sophomore Alexis Villanueva may take over first base after just two plate appearances last season. Junior Jesikah Smith made appearances in 14 games last season and will also have an increased role this spring.

"We only have 11 kids out so I don't have too many options this year," said Clark. "I really thought I'd have a couple more sophomores and maybe a couple freshmen out. I only have two freshmen out."

Clark again expects another tough league schedule with teams like Hoisington, Sterling, Pratt, and Haven in the mix. With some

unknowns in the batting lineup, that puts a little more pressure on his defense.

"Our league is tough," Clark said. "It's always tough. Laura and Ruth are going to have to pitch great games every time they take the field, and we're going to have to commit no errors. We're going to be a little different than we have in the past. I don't know that we'll have a whole lot of speed so I think our game is going to have to change a little bit."

The Lady Lions will get immediate tests with games against Sterling and Hillsboro to open the season.

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