



The Central Plains tennis team is, from left: Devin Ryan, Brett Liebl, Brady Rugan, Michael Ryan, Kade Beck, Colton Potts, and Paxton Hammeke.
(photo by Lisa Crites/CPHS)

Oiler tennis squad reloads

By MIKE COURSON
Gary Bittner's squads always find a way to reload. Central Plains graduated four seniors with a wealth of state experience, leaving two state qualifiers to return and lead the 2016 squad. "The 2016 Oiler tennis team should be a fun one to watch," Bittner said. "We return two seniors that will lead the way. The rest of the squad is composed of sophomores and freshmen."

The biggest absence will be that of Layne Bieberle, the all-around athlete who qualified for state four times. Last spring, Bieberle teamed up with Michael Ryan to finish second at state in doubles. The duo won a 6-1 first set against Kansas City Christian in the finals but lost the next two sets 6-2, 6-1.

Ryan, now a senior and another all-around athlete, returns as the leader of the team with three trips to state already under his belt.

The Oilers sent all six players to state last year. Senior Brady Rugan played in the singles bracket in his first trip to state, finishing his season with a 22-9 record. Central Plains will be without Carson Kirmer, a three-time state qualifier.

Matt Demel and Michael Lamatsch also played doubles in the state tournament last year, finishing their season with a 26-6 record. Both were two-time state qualifiers. Bittner will have to look to younger players to fill all those holes.

"Our younger players are athletic and have tennis ability," he said. "With a younger group, we are going to win some matches we shouldn't win, and we are going to lose some matches we shouldn't lose. As long as we work hard and get better each and every day we will be okay."

This year's sophomores include Kade Beck and Colton Potts. The freshmen on the team include Mason Cox, Paxton Hammeke, Brett Liebl, Jacob Oberle, and Devin Ryan.

The Oilers will again play a tough schedule this spring and several of the tennis players were part of the state basketball team that made a run late into the season to finish third. That, combined with spring break and Easter, have put the squad a little behind, but Bittner, back for a 34th season, knows he has time to get things in order.

"All I know is we

want to be playing our best tennis at the end of the year," he said. "I believe, with this group, it will happen."

Bittner is assisted by Joan Klug.



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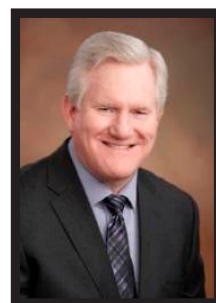


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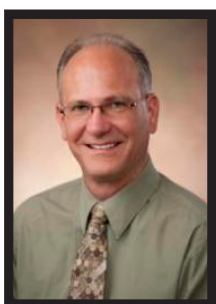
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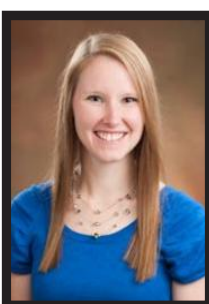
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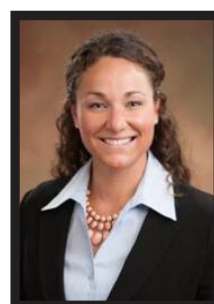
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