

# Cover story: Comley cousins set to take floor together later this season

By MIKE COURSON

The Comleys can be easy to confuse: there's Kylah, Kyler, and Kenan. All have been stand-out athletes in at least one sport for Sterling High School over the past four seasons. Kylah, a standout guard for the Lady Black Bear basketball team, graduated last May. Now it's the boys' turn. A final season of playing together was almost ended prematurely by an injury, but sometime in 2017, the Comley cousins will take the floor together.

"When I first got injured, it really scared me because I didn't know if I'd be able to play my last year with Kyler," said Kenan. "It's something we've dreamed of since we were little — we've played together since the third and fourth grade. Through that, we've built a great relationship with each other. We thrive off each other on the court and just have a lot of fun. My last year with Kyler is going to really special to me."

Kenan and Kylah are brother and sister, and Kyler is the cousin. Over the years, the boys watched Kylah develop into an all-state guard who helped lead Sterling to two state tournaments in her four years of varsity play. The boys nearly made it last year.

"It's a lot of fun," Kyler said. "We've all gone to basketball tournaments as a family. We all packed into their 8-person Suburban and we went to whatever basketball tournament we were going to. It was a blast. It's been



Kenan Comley

a lot of fun growing up and playing with them throughout the years. Watching Kylah, she had so much success. It was awesome to see all that happening."

As a freshman, Kyler was on a Black Bear team that won just four games. By his sophomore season, the team improved its record to 14-7. Last year, Sterling was consistently in the Class 3A rankings. A late-season injury likely cost the team a trip to the state tournament.

"We went into halftime against Scott City ahead by four," Kyler said of last year's sub-state finale. "They came back in the third quarter and got up by seven. We started to make our run when Kenan got hurt. We still made a run and went ahead by two, then we ended up losing by two."

Kenan injured his foot with about seven minutes to play in the game. After some down time to heal, he played football this fall and, as quarterback,



Kyler Comley

was an integral part in the team's run to the playoffs, but the foot injury eventually caught up with him. He missed the playoffs after having surgery, and that same surgery will keep him off the basketball court for the first part of the basketball season.

"I don't think I'm going to be too worried," Kenan said of his return, likely to be in late January. "I'm going to make sure I'm 100 percent before I come back to my first game. It happened in

last year's sub-state championship and it's been bugging me since then. I just want to take it slow this time, even if it means I have to sit out our games."

The Comley boys were just part of what was expected to be a loaded Sterling roster this year. Kenan will sit out games, and junior Blake Richter was lost for the entire season. Even with those losses, Sterling could still be a 3A power.

"We have a solid junior and senior group," Kyler said. "We've had a lot of people on our bench the last few years and they have some really good experience at the varsity level. Going through my mind, I'm thinking it was pretty big (when Kenan had his surgery), but we have very athletic defenders and guards who can trade places and do a nice job. I wasn't too worried. It's just the 'next man up' mentality. Your team is going to step up for you."

Kyler is one of several seniors on the basketball team this season, and the group has one goal: make it to state. The Black Bears have not played at state since winning the Class 2A title in 2012. This year could be the year.

"For any senior, this is the last shot so it's a bucket list thing," Kyler said. "You also want to do it for your teammates. That's a team goal. We're all there wanting to do the same thing and everyone wants it just as bad as the next person. We want it bad. We just have to take that next step."

## Pawnee Heights basketball 2016-17

Dec. 2	@Fowler
Dec. 5-9	@Natoma Tourn.
Dec. 13	@Western Plains
Dec. 16	MINNEOLA
Dec. 20	BUCKLIN
Jan. 6	ASHLAND
Jan. 10	KIOWA COUNTY
Jan. 13	SATANTA
Jan. 17	@Hodgeman Co.
Jan. 20	SPIAA Play-in (G)
Jan. 21	SPIAA Play-in (B)
Jan. 23-28	SPIAA Tourn.
Jan. 31	@Spearville
Feb. 3	SOUTH GRAY
Feb. 7	@Deerfield
Feb. 10	SOUTH CENTRAL
Feb. 14	@Bucklin
Feb. 17	INGALLS
Feb. 27	Sub-state
March. 7-10	State

## Pawnee Heights boys making transition from gridiron to hardcourt

By MIKE GILMORE

The age-old adage goes, "Success breeds Success." Studies have borne this out, especially in the early going.

The Pawnee Heights Tiger basketball boys are taking the adage to heart, after their first foray on the football field in five years finished in a state-championship final game.

Fourth-year coach Gustavo Flores is banking on the thought that the Tigers will not only be competitive, they'll win more games along the way in 2016-17.

"The guys are not only pumped up — psyched — about the season, they are pumped-up physically as well," said Flores, whose Tigers finished the 2015-16 season 7-12, with two wins in their Class 1A-DII sub-state in Burrton. After knocking off host Burrton 68-60 in the first round, the Tigers very nearly pulled off the upset of the tourney in the semifinals, falling to top-seeded Hutchinson Central Christian 55-54 after being down

21-8 in the first quarter. It was Flores' first winning season with the Tigers in three years, up from 1-18 the year before.

HCC fell to Hartford 65-64 as fourth seed in last year's C1A-DII tournament, but — according to the state's coaches — are picked to win it all this year.

That is good news for the Tigers, Flores said.

"We went into sub-state last year thinking that we were the definition of 'underdog,'" Flores recalled. "We beat Burrton and were within one point of knocking off Central Christian. It hadn't occurred to us that 'hey, we can hang with these guys — we can beat them.' It's good news for us that Central Christian came out No. 1. We're thinking about that. We're thinking about beating them at sub-state, maybe going to state."

Thinking about state basketball tournament appearances had Flores deep into "way-back" mode. "I don't think we've ever had a state

tournament appearance," Flores mused. "Not as Pawnee Heights. I know that before the consolidation, Burdett had a state appearance and Rozel had one, but not together."

For the history-minded, the two schools merged in 1968.

Last year, the Tigers' season began as it ended, in a tightly-contested, see-saw, 51-50 loss to SPIAA rival Fowler in Goldbug territory. "It was down to a last-second shot," Flores recalled. "That surprised us as much as anybody. For some reason, we have a mental block thing with Fowler. We are working this season to get rid of that."

It helps that the Tigers will be entertaining the Goldbugs in Rozel in their Dec. 2 season opener. Then, it's off to the Natoma preseason tournament, where the Tigers have been steadily gaining ground.

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