

# Sterling boys must work around injuries to reach powerhouse status

By Mike Courson

The injury bug is alive and well in Sterling. The Black Bears just missed a trip to state last season and were poised to be a Class 3A powerhouse this winter. Injuries make the journey more difficult, but nothing is out of the question for Derek Schneider's squad that went 17-6 last season.

"I think that no matter what happens the year before, you have to work your tail off every off season, as well as in season, to compete with the teams on your schedule," Schneider said. "Last year, we were fortunate to have some success, and this year we will have to work just as hard to compete at a high level."

Schneider was set to have his top-four scorers return. Junior Kenan Comley led the team with 17.1 points a night last year but went down with a foot injury late in the football season. He will play the second half of the basketball season. Junior Blake Richter was third on the team last year at 10.9 points a game, and he led the team with eight rebounds a game. He will miss the entire season with an injury.

"Injuries are just a part of the game, and I am excited to see who will step up into a bigger role this year," said Schneider. "Blake was a big loss, and not having Kenan for the first half of the season will give some of the other guys a great opportunity to step up for us."

Senior Kyler Comley (6-0) is a proven threat after three successful varsity seasons. Last year, he averaged 16.3 points a game and made 40 percent of his 3-point tries. He was a first-team all-league player in a tough Central Kansas League.

Kenan Comley (5-9) was another first-team selection in the league after another big season. He made 44 of his 119 3-point tries (37 percent). Kenan also led the team with 85 assists and 47 steals. As one of the top guards in the area, he is expected to return in January.

Junior Lucas Briar (6-4) is yet another scoring threat for Sterling. A returning starter, Briar hit 30 3-pointers last year and averaged 8.5 points a game. His 3.8 rebounds a night were third-best on the squad.

Senior Brady Ochs (6-1) also returns as a



**2016-17 Black Bears**, front row from left: Caleb Lambert, Kyle Stover, Javier Zimmerman, Garrett Bates, Cade Wilkey, Conan Ball, Dallas Lackey, Moises Zimmerman, and Garrett Sankey. Middle Row: Kenan Comley, Trent Jones, Max Fulbright, Logan Weigel, Brady Myers, James McNutt, Max Dutton, Edward Weiner, and Marcus Lackey. Back row: Kyler Comley, Luke Harding, Joel White, Lucas Briar, JJ Oden, Ryan Birzer, John Schweizer, Brady Ochs. Brett Oden, and Jordan Mullins. (photo by Mike Courson)

starter and three-year letterwinner. He was fourth on the team with 3.7 rebounds last year and also averaged 1.7

points a night. Senior Edward Weiner (5-10) is another three-year letterwinner with starting experience. He averaged

two points a night last season.

Schneider will also have experience on his bench. Senior JJ Oden

(6-3) already has three years of experience, as does senior Joel White (5-9). Seniors Brett Oden, Max Fulbright, and Will Dutton also return.

The biggest change for Sterling this year will be the new schedule featuring Heart of America League schools. After early games against Hillsboro and at the Kingman Tournament, the Black Bears will have to wait until the end of the season to see familiar CKL foes.

"I am excited to be in our new league with a solid basketball tradition," Schneider said. "We look forward to playing both our league and non-league schedule this season."

## Sterling basketball 2016-17

Dec. 2	@Hillsboro
Dec. 6-10	@Kingman Tourn.
Dec. 13	NICKERSON
Dec. 17	Wich. Trinity @McPherson
Jan. 3	@Moundridge
Jan. 6	BENNINGTON
Jan. 10	HUTCH TRINITY
Jan. 13	@Remington
Jan. 17-20	STERLING INVITE
Jan. 31	INMAN
Feb. 3	MARION
Feb. 7	@Eil-Saline
Feb. 10	@Berean Academy
Feb. 14	SEDGWICK
Feb. 17	@Kingman
Feb. 21	HESSTON
2-28/3-3	Sub-state
March 6-11	State



**2016-17 Lady Black Bears**, front row from left: Mia Stinemetz, Mallory Beltz, Maddie Thrasher, Aniston Ramsey, Kaylee Zimmerman, and McKiah San Miguel. Middle row: Lexi Rose (Mgr.), Maddison Morgan, Alaina Madden, Elizabeth Horsch, Lexi Edwards, Kidist Wilson, Grace Rowland, Shelby Dreir, and Natalie Nichols (Mgr.). Back row: Sophia McNutt (Mgr.), Emma Horsch, Linsday Gilmore, Elise Kelley, Camille Schweizer, Kaih Zambo, Taya Wilson, Kenzie Comley, Debi Schmidt, and Abby Riffel (Mgr.) (photo by Mike Courson)

# Lady Black Bears to contend with major losses

By Mike Courson

Over the last four seasons, Lady Black Bear Coach Jill Rowland has had the luxury of relying on one of the top point guards in the state. The results speak for themselves: two trips to state, including a third-place finish in 2A in 2013, and a fourth-place finish in 3A last season.

But the losses will be significant this winter. Kylah Comley is gone, as are Emma Lambert, Sydney Wil-

son, and Sarah Stallings – all starters from last year's team that finished at 23-3. Also missing will be Keena Schweizer and Kadie Smith, Rowland's two posts off the bench last year.

The loss of those players will be big. Comley averaged nearly 19 points a game and provided a huge outside and defensive threat on the court. Lambert added 11.4 points a night.

"We lost a lot of offense with graduation and transfers, and we're still looking to redefine ourselves," Rowland said. "We don't really change our expectations due to graduation. We will still like to get out and run and work extremely tough on the defensive end. We have kids with varsity experience, but they will all have to expand their roles this year."

Leading that charge is senior Maddie Thrasher (5-4). Thrasher was gaining



Maddie Thrasher

steam last year before going down with a season-ending knee injury at the Sterling Invitational last January. Thrasher has healed up and placed fourth at the state tennis tournament this fall. Thrasher averaged six points and three assists a game last year.

Rowland will have another returning starter in junior Taya Wilson, a high-energy player who averaged seven points and three assists a game

last season. Also returning this year are seniors Emma Horsch and Linsday Gilmore, and juniors Alley Rowland, Camille Schweizer, and Aniston Ramsey.

"We are glad to have Maddie back from a season-ending injury last year, and look to our juniors and seniors for leadership this year. Taya and Maddie return with most of our experience, and we are looking for others to step up."

Over the past few seasons, Sterling has had to battle other tough teams. The girls edged Central Plains to make it to state in 2013. In 2014 and 2015, Sterling was part of a brutal Central Kansas League that included Lyons and Hesston. This season, the Lady Black Bears will switch it up with games against Heart of America League teams that have included powerhouses like Moundridge, Berean Academy, and Remington.





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