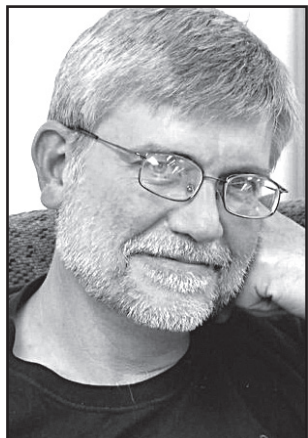


# Golden Belt cagers look to 'Year of the Tiger' in 2016-17



By Mike Gilmore

The Chinese New Year, which begins Jan. 28, has as its traditional animal the Rooster for 2017.

For Golden Belt basketball teams, however, it's the "Year of the Tiger."

The St. John Tigers and the Pawnee Heights Tigers are among the cage teams expecting good things this season.

Amend that -- for the Tigers -- to "great things."

The St. John Tiger boys adapted to Wade-less basketball last year, going 19-4 on the season. Good record, but for Coach Clint

Kinnamon's clubs, not the usual. Not for a program that has collected seven state tournament appearances and four state championships in the 16 years of Kinnamon's tenure.

Last year, Kinnamon was asked (a lot) about the Central Plains Oilers, not just about playing them four times, but also losing to them -- especially in a season-ending sub-state final. Outwardly, Kinnamon was gracious; he, after all, knows the ropes concerning media types. Inwardly, well... coming off the Tigers' home court after last March's 48-46 loss, he's thinking "Not gonna happen, again. Not next year."

Class 2A's coaches think so, too, heading into the 2016-17 preseason. The Tigers, with solid post (Jacob Milton) and one solid utility backup (Nathan Ward) lost to graduation, are back on top. The Oilers, who were hit hard by the May ceremony, have tumbled to ninth position. Spearville, always a



St. John seniors Cole Kinnamon (left) and Jorge Calleros, both pictured against Central Plains' Jacob Warnken last season, look to be one of the top one-two punches in Kansas this season.

(photos by Mike Courson)

season competitor, is in the middle at No. 6.

Kinnamon knows that in coaching, the main thing is not what you've done; which in St. John means 275 wins against 84 losses -- but what you're gonna do.

The Tigers have been busy in the off-season. The team that plays together, wins together. Especially from the perimeter. The

current Tiger squad will be especially deadly from long range, led by 6-1 senior shootist Jorge Calleros, who hit around 40 percent of his shots from behind the arc last year. Point guard Cole Kinnamon is a senior, too, bringing back a team-leading 17 points and five assists per contest. Don't foul Cole. He makes 8-of-10 from the stripe.

I've only talked up two -- there are 10 more (with two more starters) and nine with state experience.

**Pawnee Heights moving ahead** -- Fourth-year Pawnee Heights head coach Gustavo Flores smiles a lot more lately. He's been smiling since August, when the lion's share of his Tiger cage lineup hit the gridiron. OK, so the Pawnee

County Tigers aren't as long nor as deep as the ones in St. John. That doesn't mean that they're not just as hungry for hardware. It's been a long time since the white banner boards hanging in the Rozel gym have been updated.

The Golden Belt "Year of the Tiger" starts Dec. 2, and ends March 4. Don't miss it.

## Lots of state champions not out of the question for area teams



By Mike Courson

Beat writers have a tendency to be "homers" or "cheerleaders" for the local team. While I am that, I try to keep my stories honest. Yet here's a statement that is both flattering and honest: expect some state championships in the area in February and March.

Barton and Stafford Counties have been a hotbed of good basketball the last few years. Expect that trend to continue. St. John has been exceptional over the last few years -

obviously, setting a state record for consecutive wins is no easy task - yet I almost feel this could be one of Clint Kinnamon's best teams. Not only does he have a lot of returning firepower, but those kids are hungry after last year's near miss.

Equally as impressive, the Central Plains girls have lost just one time in the last three years. Normally, one would expect that dynasty to slow down. I'm not so sure it will. Pat Stiles loses two tremendous players in Reagan Phelan and Taylor Rolfs, but he gets another one - at least I hear - in freshman Emily Ryan. And she joins a group of girls that have plenty of varsity experience and plenty of success on both the volleyball and basketball courts.

I said three years ago

when the Lady Oilers won their first title that they could go unbeaten for three seasons. I was one bad night off. So it's been easy to pick Central Plains as the 2A frontrunner. It's a little less easy this year because of the unknowns, but I still think only a fool would bet against those Lady Oilers doing something spectacular.

Elsewhere around the Central Prairie League, my team this year is Kinsley. I had the opportunity to watch the Lady Coyotes in sub-state last year, and I've tooted Scout Frame's horn for a couple years now. They had a great, athletic freshman last year, and they were one of Central Plains' best tests on the year. I expect Central Plains to go 1-2 in the CPL, and with any luck, we will be treated to

a classic when those two teams meet in Claflin for Senior Night on Feb. 17.

I hope for some great games on the boys' side as well. Derek Joiner has coached his Ellinwood Eagles to back-to-back winning seasons - a rare feat in recent history over there. He'll have something to say about the Kinsley photo I'm running in this edition, but I'm still going to pick his Eagles to finish in the top-three of the league. St. John is a natural selection at No. 1, and Central Plains is always hard to discount.

The culture has changed in Ellinwood. Joiner joins Jason and Shelly Duvall, who have brought a lot of success to other Ellinwood teams. The Eagles have won a lot in recent years, whether it be softball, basketball,



Kinsley senior Scout Frame

cross country/track, tennis, or golf.

The Central Kansas League takes a hit with the loss of Sterling. I really enjoyed seeing the Black Bears play some of our other area schools. Any time I can get a Rice County school to make the trek to Hoisington - home of the best basketball lights in the area - that makes my job a lot easier.

In all honesty, I'm not up to speed on my CKL basketball this year. Kingman, with the Bangert sisters, is a likely candidate to win the girls' side. Great Bend said goodbye to Chris Battin, who takes over a loaded team in Pratt. Watch for Samson Kohman this season if you see the Greenbacks coming to town.

**Early tournaments**

The last couple of years, we have waited an extra week to put out our Winter Sports Preview.

The result is a really hectic week while the Keady Classic goes down in Larned.

This year, it was just hectic dealing with the Thanksgiving break. But everything will finish come tip time in Larned.

It can be a top-heavy tournament and I expect more of the same this year. I consider the boys side to be loaded with St. John, Spearville, Macksville, and Ellinwood. St. John should be an easy favorite if Kinnamon's guys are clicking.

On the girls' side, my vote goes to Kinsley. After a slow start, the Lady Coyotes turned it on late in the season and played at state. The aforementioned Frame: she's the cheerleader who can. I've watched her outwork opponents for a few years now and I hope

see **Thoughts** page 17

## Young Cougars rebuild for upcoming winter schedule

By Mike Gilmore

The Otis-Bison Cougar boys wrapped up a rough season slate last year with a 44-39 loss to Minneola in their Class 1A-DI sub-state final, ending the season at 12-10 and 2-7 in the Central Prairie League.

First-year coach Curtis Little has some rebuilding to do this season, as two seniors return with court experience. "We had three key losses to graduation in Brandon Keller, Nick Higgason and Hayden Meier," Little said. "We are going to struggle to score the basketball, but we will be a good defensive team with decent size.

Returning for the Cougars this season are senior guard Kade Urban, who provided 5.7 points and three rebounds per game, along with sophomore forward Maitland Wiltse, who averaged 10.8 ppg., and 7.1 rpg. Trevor Trapp returns as a senior guard, along with junior post Clade Anderson. Top newcomers include junior guard Blake Bahr and sophomores Anton Foust and Luke Higgason.

The Cougars open the season against Wilson and then travel to the Wakeeney Tournament in pre-holiday play.

**Regan returns** -- Taylor Regan,

a three-time all-CPL, all-state first teamer, returns as a Lady Cougar starter in her senior season. Regan will be counted on for her 18-point average in a very tough CPL slate; she will have help from senior Caitlyn Schilowsky and junior Lacy Mitchell at guard; Newcomers Cristen Trapp, Maddie Wiltse and Cara Anderson add to the bench for second-year head coach Robert Trapp.

The Lady Cougars went 10-12 overall and 2-6 in CPL play last season, falling to Highway 4 rival La Crosse 63-38 in their sub-state opener.

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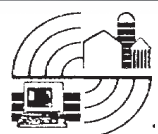
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## Little River basketball 2016-17

Dec. 2	ELL-SALINE
Dec. 5	@Goessel Invite (B/G)
Dec. 13	@Cent. Christian
Dec. 16	@Peabody-Burns
Dec. 20	ELYRIA CHRIST.
Jan. 6	@Canton-Galva
Jan. 10	@Centre
Jan. 13	HERINGTON
Jan. 16-19	@Burrton Tourn. (B)
Jan. 24-27	@BCC Tourn. (G)
Jan. 31	@Goessel
Feb. 3	@Wakefield
Feb. 7	SOLOMON
Feb. 10	RURAL VISTA
Feb. 14	GOESSEL
Feb. 17	@Inman
Feb. 21	CANTON-GALVA
Feb. 27	Sub-state
March. 7-10	State

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