

New coach, new league: Lady Black Bear softball still strong in 2017

By MIKE COURSON

New coach, same high expectations. Tyson Bauerle stepped down as the Lady Black Bear skipper and new coach Dean Mantz - if he can be called that with 24 years of experience, including six years as Bauerle's assistant in Sterling - will have a plethora of talent returning from last year's team that lost just two games.

"Like any other team, we expect to compete and earn respect from the other programs in the (Heart of America League)," Mantz said. "We plan on earning that respect by our play while competing for a league title and a trip to state. I also expect to see contributions made by some of our sophomores and freshmen to go along with a couple new upperclassmen."

Mantz coached his first 14 years in Lyons and helped start the baseball program there. As head coach from 2002

through 2006, his Lions won a Class 3A championship in 2004. Mantz arrived in Sterling with no intention of coaching softball but Bauerle asked him to be an assistant and he signed on in 2011.

Last season, the Lady Black Bears posted a 20-2 season, won the Central Kansas League title, and played in a regional championship game. With five starters back, and eight players with experience, Mantz expects his squad to be a favorite in its new league.

Sterling will be without Kyla Comley and Sarah Stallings, two all-league contributors last year. Both reached base more than half the time, and Stallings was a power bat with three home runs and 29 RBIs. Comley changed the dynamic of the infield with her play at shortstop. Mantz will also be without Shelby Schroeder at third base, and Jody

Gunther and Veronica Norez in the outfield.

The Lady Black Bears will return plenty of firepower. In the circle, senior Emma Horsch earned all-league and second-team All-State honors last year. Horsch was 17-1 in the circle last year, striking out 144 batters in just 114 innings. She carried a paltry 1.47 ERA.

As good as she was in the circle, Horsch was just as dangerous with a bat. Her .463 batting average was third-best on the squad last spring, and she led the team in hits (38), triples (6), RBIs (33), and runs (36). Also back in the infield is senior Lindsay Gilmore, a first-team all-stater and all-league player at first base. Gilmore's .493 average led the team last season, as did her 13 doubles. She finished with 37 hits, driving in 32 and scoring 28 times.

Also back for Mantz at second base is Raegan



The 2017 Sterling Lady Black Bears are, back row from left: Morgan Anderson (mgr.), Haley Kreie, Kamryn Gillespie, Kiah Zambo, Kelsie Boeken, Emma Horsch, and Bethany Anderson (mgr.). Middle Row: Abby Riffel, Mallory Beltz, Aniston Ramsey, Camille Schweitzer, Elizabeth Horsch, and Lindsay Gilmore. Front Row: Kiley Eidson, Avrey Holliday, Jasmine Bates, Raegan Mantz, and Maddie Thrasher. Not pictured: Sydnee Carder and Lauren Frederick.

(photo by Mike Courson)

Mantz, a second-team All-CKL selection last year. Kelsie Boeken earned an all-league honorable mention, and Camille Schweizer was also a starter. Raegan was hit by 12 pitches last year, and her .542 OBP

was second-best on the team. Boeken batted .370 and drove in 14 runs.

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Sterling softball 2017

March 31	@Hutch Trinity
April 4	ELL-SALINE
April 7	@Remington
April 13	@Cheney
April 18	BENNINGTON
April 21	@Marion
April 25	INMAN
May 2	CANTON-GALVA
May 5	@Sedgwick
May 9	MOUNDRIDGE
May 15-19	Regional
May 25-26	State

Sterling tennis 2017

April 4	@Ellsworth
April 6	@Hillsboro
April 11	HOME
April 18	@Buhler
April 20	HOME
April 25	@Hesston
April 27	@Lindsborg
May 1	CPL @Wichita
May 6	Regionals TBA
May 12-13	State

Three state qualifiers back for Sterling squad

By MIKE COURSON

The Black Bear tennis team has been climbing in recent seasons. The squad placed eighth at state in 2016 and moved to fourth place last season, missing state hardware by a single point. With several players back, longtime head coach Curtis Thompson, back for a 17th season at SHS, has reason to remain optimistic.

Senior Kyler Comley returns as a three-time state qualifier. Last season, Comley advanced to the state semifinals where he was defeated by Sacred Heart's Stratton Brown, who capped an unbeaten season with the championship. Brown also returns as a senior this year. Comley went on to finish fourth at state after a loss to Central Plains' Michael Ryan, who has graduated.

Sterling had the top-two singles players in the Central Kansas League last year in Comley and



The 2017 Sterling tennis team is, front row from left: Jeremy Thorpe, Joshua Curtis, Edward Weiner, Max Fulbright, and William Weiner. Back row: Jordan Mullins, Tucker Robson, Brett Riffel, Kyler Comley, and Kenan Comley. Not pictured: Bryce Wilson, Cooper Galyon, and Andy Norez.

(courtesy photo)

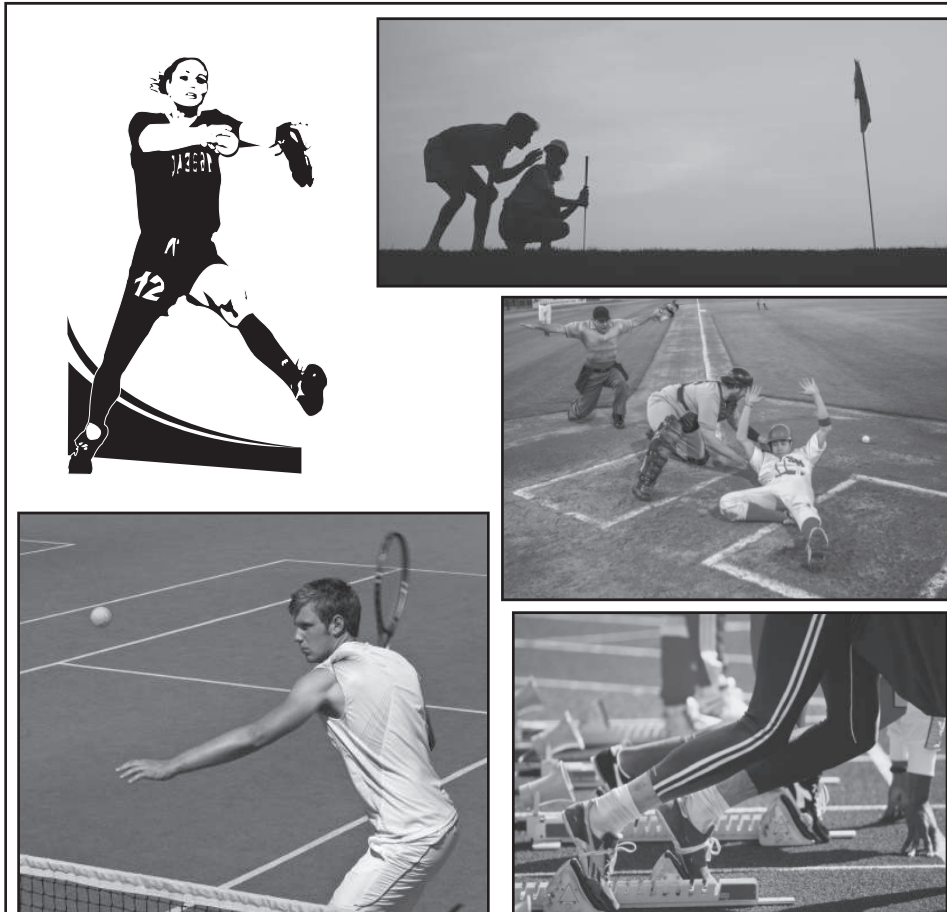
second-place finisher William Weiner. As a freshman last year, Weiner placed sixth at state in a tough run that included losses to the state runner up and fifth-place finisher.

Thompson also has a pair of state qualifiers

from the doubles side back. Seniors Max Fulbright and Edward Weiner won a match at state before bowing out against the eventual third-place finishers from Scott City.

Sophomore Brett Riffel also returns to the

varsity squad this year, as does junior Kenan Comley, who missed last season with an injury. Though he has many of his pieces back from a year ago, Thompson is still working on a final roster.



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