



The 2017 Ellinwood tennis team is, from left: Matthew Fortkamp, Jacob Kasselmann, Brook Degenhardt, Morgan Fortkamp, Caleb Bookout, and Keaton Robl. (photo by Mike Courson)

Two returners back for Ellinwood tennis

Head coach Mike Fortkamp returns just two starters from last year’s squad in senior Jacob Kasselmann and junior Keaton Robl. The squad also includes incoming freshmen Brook Degenhardt, Caleb Bookout, Matthew Fortkamp, and Morgan Fortkamp. Kasselmann played doubles last year and will need to step up and play No. 1 singles this year. Kasselmann and his former partner, Eric Jones, came up just shy of a state tournament berth when they were defeated in a tiebreaker by a tough Central Plains duo in the first round of regionals. Central Plains, as a team, went on to

win the state tournament. “I expect Jacob to step up as a leader for this team and push his young teammates to strive to get better each day,” Coach Fortkamp said. “His confidence and mental toughness has improved since last year. I am excited about how this group of kids will do this year. We have a young team but a talented team so we shall see how that translates to the court.” Robl primarily played No. 2 singles last year and improved as the year progressed. “He had never played before but picked it up quickly,” Fortkamp said. “He has really grown over the past year and I may use

him and his added height at doubles.” The incoming freshmen had a solid middle school season last year and are looking to continue their winning ways this year. The team placed second at the final meet of the season at Smoky Valley behind Hesston. Morgan Fortkamp played singles and Matthew Fortkamp, Degenhardt, and Bookout played doubles. “I don’t know who will play what just yet,” said Coach Fortkamp. “But I know we have some young talent that will be fun to work with.”

Baseball is Back



The 2017 Ellinwood baseball team is, front row from left: Kyler Doll, Todd Hamby, Cole Kubick, Blake Garman, Justyn Shafer, Ryan Niles, and Tyler Knop. Back row: Jacob Herrman, Woodson Corbett, Eric Jones, Gage Miller, Kodie McFarren, Luke Wondra, Zack Jacobs, and David Hammeke. (photo by Mike Courson)

Eagle baseball team looks to make waves

By MIKE COURSON There’s a new team in town. After 55 years without, high school baseball will again be played in Ellinwood. Coach Doug Bender has been working with a variety of experience levels to get his squad ready for its first game. “Not demeaning the boys, but it was like starting a T-ball program,” Bender said. “T-ball kids are used to just picking up a ball and throwing it, and if they can hit off a tee, outstanding. Some of these guys have good approaches already that were put in them by their Babe Ruth or Cal Ripken coaches. But some of them haven’t played

except for playing catch in the yard with their parents. “Getting them to extend their arms and getting them to hold the ball properly has been a square one type of thing. We have some kids who have some natural talent. It’s just getting them to use it with baseball skills. We have some very raw athletes - Destin Baker, Jacob herrman, Todd Hamby - these guys just have a lot of strength and ability but they’ve never put it into the baseball world.” Bender brings a wealth of experience to Ellinwood. He played for Great Bend High School, American Legion teams, and Barton Community College. He began coaching in the mid 1970s with a steady diet of teams ranging from recreation ball to high school to collegiate to semi-professional.

Bender will be assisted by Drew Hosman, for a former University of Kansas pitcher, and Trevor Bieberle, who is helping the infielders and outfielders. “Coaching staff-wise, I think we’re one of the better staffs in 2A baseball, just with our experience level,” said Bender. “I don’t know what’s out there. I expect Little River and Ellis to be pretty good. But the rest of them, I don’t see why we can’t compete with them.” Going into a first season, there are no statistics for Bender to use. The Eagles have just been taking it a day at a time to determine who will play where. On March 22, the team scrimmaged against parents for some live hitting situations. “This way, with the parents hitting against us, we didn’t know where the ball was going to go so there was no situational play,” Bender said. “The boys took some steps forward. That’s a strange thing to say playing parents, but they handled the defense well, they talked. “Right now, it’s about teaching the fundamentals and doing things right, whether it be communicating, running the bases properly, hitting behind

the runner, where to lay the bunt down, lining up for cutoffs. We’re doing those things. Those were things we weren’t doing in the first two weeks.” Pitching is always a key in high school baseball. Sophomore Zach Jacobs will be the top pitcher in the Eagle rotation. “He could actually be No. 1 at nine different positions,” said Bender. “He just has the most baseball experience.” Other pitchers will include freshmen David Hammeke, Blake Garman, and Luke Wondra, and sophomore Jayce Christensen. Bender is walking into a sport with a new rule: pitchers cannot throw more than 105 pitches in four days, or 75 pitches in three days. “We play Tuesday-Thursday at home, so I’m going to throw a minimum of four pitchers,” Bender said of his first week. “If I need a reliever in each game, that’s eight. I better watch my pitch counts. If you’re a coach, it forces or allows you to develop pitchers. That’s a great thing at the high school level.”

Depth in the rotation has always been a luxury for baseball coaches, especially at small schools, but with the new pitch count rule, it’s now a necessity. “We’re going to be deep in pitching. We’ve got eight kids who can throw the ball - more strikes than balls. My pitching coach, Drew Hosman, has done phenomenal things with these guys in three weeks. It’s amazing to see how far they’ve come with mechanics, pushing off, and arm extension. Drew pitched at KU, so he knows what he’s talking about. Trevor Bieberle has been a great help with the outfield and infield mechanics.” Elsewhere around the horn, Bender is still figuring out who will be where. Garman, Kodie McFarren, and Justyn Shafer are potential catchers. Gage Miller, Jacob Herrman, Wondra, and Gus Corbett are potentials at first. Bender said many of his players can play in multiple spots. The rest of the field looks like: second base – Kyler Doll, Cole Kubik, Baker; third base – Hammeke and Christensen; short – Tyler Knop and Wondra; left – Christensen and Todd Hamby; center – Ryan Niles; right – Eric Jones. Bender is not worried about having a first-year team. He still has high expectations and expects a win or two each time out. “Our goal, and it’s possibly a dream, is to make the state tournament,” he said. “It’s in Great Bend. How cool would that be for a first-year program? To speak in baseball cliches, we’d like to sweep at home and split on the road. Can we? It’s entirely possible.”

Ellinwood tennis 2017

March 30	@Pratt
April 1	@Great Bend
April 4	@Ellsworth
April 7	@Hoisington
April 13	@Ellsworth
April 20	HOME
April 24	@Great Bend
April 25	@Larned
April 27	@Smoky Valley
May 6	Regionals TBA
May 12-13	State

Ellinwood baseball 2017

March 28	LINCOLN
April 4	@Minneola
April 7	@Ellis
April 11	RUSSELL
April 13	@Ulysses
April 21	LITTLE RIVER
April 25	CANTON-GALVA
April 28	@Ellsworth
May 4	@Lincoln
May 8	ELLIS
May 15-19	Regional
May 25-26	State

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