

# Baseball rising: Tribe building on tradition in 2017

By Mike Gilmore  
Tiller Sports

LARNED -- Don't talk to Larned baseball coach Chad Erway about rebuilding. He is always in a building mode -- has been since he took over the program in 2010. Even with the loss of three stellar infielders -- and starting pitchers -- to graduation, Erway is eager to talk about who he has coming back; who he has coming up.

"Some people have talked to me about this year being a rebuilding year," noted the veteran coach, who recorded his first state appearance in 2015, finishing third with a 19-4 record at the Class 4A Division II state tournament. "I just don't view it that way."

Last year, the Indians also finished third at the Class 3A state tilt with a 19-4 record that includes a third-straight Central Kansas League crown (15-1) back-to-back regional titles and a three-year record of 53 wins and 14 losses. Erway was honored for his efforts in 2016 as the Class 3A Coach of the Year, with a seven-year tally of 76-71.

"We have six returning starters and we've got some guys with a little dirt in their cleats that have played in some big games. I view it as we have some seasoned players that should step up and carry on the tradition of winning baseball."

Senior Mason Schartz returns in center field and leadoff batter; senior Jonathan Herter, a five-hole hitter, returns to first base.

Between them in the lineup last year were Evan Skelton (P/2B) now with the Friends University baseball program; Landon Erway (P/SS/2B) now at Fort Hays State University; and Isiah Perez (P/SS/IB) now with the Barton Community College Cougars.

The three pitcher-infielders were responsible for a hefty portion of the offense as well as defense; Erway finished his senior season

batting .426 with 27 RBI, going 10-for-11 in stolen bases.

Last year senior outfielder Tanner Galliard also exits from the lineup batting ninth.

With those holes to fill, Erway will be moving several players up from the junior varsity, many who saw some varsity time in various positions.

Depending upon who is pitching. The state is scrapping its innings-based pitching limit rule for a stiffer pitch-count system at the behest of the National High School Federation monitoring prep sports. The rule now limits high school pitchers to 105 pitches with four days of rest between outings, whereas the old system limited hurlers to nine innings per day.

"We've already put practically everybody on the mound in practice, because we'll be looking at a throwing-by-committee scenario," Erway said of the rule. "I'm predicting that success is going to derive from good starting pitching with not having an elevated pitch count. You'll rely more on your starter and not go to a middle reliever before you have a closer at the end. Otherwise, you're just chewing up your pen and chewing up your infield."

Depending on the pitching, "right now, I have Carson Smith behind the dish; Herter at first; Schartz in center. We're looking at moving Gage Skelton (P-3B) from third to shortstop with Jordan Taylor (DH) at third. Dalton Bright (P/LF) will continue to be in left and Colton Gladow (P-RF) in right with a few other guys."

On the mound, "this is the first time that we have two quality left-handed pitchers," Erway noted. "Herter has good potential and Alex Barger will throw strikes and let our defense work. "We'll develop our other pitchers, Skelton, Smith, Bright and Gladow. The bullpen is going to be a big factor with the pitch-count rule in play."



Jonathan Herter and Chad Erway at 2016 state

Herter, Skelton and Barger are two-year starters; Schartz, Smith and Bright are returning starters from last season.

Herter, who returns as the team's long-ball hitter, drilled a grand slam to lift the Tribe past Pratt to clinch the CKL last year.

But the balance of the offense will continue in Erway's "small ball" tradition, he said.

"Right now, we're still trying to get a base knowledge on what our foundation will be this year; the pitching rule is going to play a big part in offense," Erway said. "But we are going to really focus on our bread-and-butter, 'small ball' game. A lot of bunting, lot of hit-and-run, a lot of aggressive baserunning. We just don't have the lineup that's going to sit back and smack 10-12 home runs. We'll manufacture runs and play good defense and hopefully that combination will work for us."

The Tribe opens the varsity season today at Kingman. The JV tried out the pitch count rule on Monday

at Moffet Stadium on a split doubleheader with Nickerson.

"The first couple games are just going to be by feel, just to see new kids in new positions," Erway said.

"Third base and second base are still basically open right now. It's hard to really evaluate as a coach during practice and scrimmages because you're going against

yourself; that's something that's evident during game play. I think we'll know a lot more at the second week of the season who's going to go into positions.

"I think I've got a pretty good idea of what I've got in the older players. I have history with some of the players that have played for four years and I know what I'm going to get from them."

## Larned baseball 2017

March 31

April 4

April 7

April 11

April 18

April 21

April 25

May 4

May 9

May 11

May 15-19

May 25-26

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