

State champion Oilers ready to make another run at a title

By MIKE COURSON

Expectations are always high at Central Plains. For Gary Bittner's tennis teams, that has meant a handful of individual state champions and state medalists in recent seasons. Last spring, the Oiler boys delivered Bittner his first team championship. With several pieces of that team back, expectations will remain high for Central Plains this year.

"I think I have a hard-working group that loves to play the game," Bittner said. "They should be fun to watch."

Bittner will be without a couple players who graduated last year in Michael Ryan and Brady Rugan. Rugan had teamed up with then-freshman Devin Ryan to play for a state doubles championship. Michael Ryan finished third in the singles bracket.

Those absences will mean some changes to the Oiler roster. Devin Ryan will move to singles, and junior Kade Beck and sophomore Brett Liebl will move into the No. 1 doubles spot. Liebl and Beck

placed fifth at state last year. "After that, we need to find the right player and doubles team to fill our remaining positions," Bittner said.

Junior Colton Potts returns as a letterman, as does sophomore Paxton Hammeke. Rounding out the roster is senior Aaron Schneweis, sophomores Mason Cox and Mason Wimmer, and freshmen JJ Heredia, Andrew Meier, and Lawson Oeser.

As reigning 3-2-1A champs, the Oilers will have a bigger-than-usual target on their backs all spring. The goal, Bittner says, is to improve each time out.

"There are a number of outstanding players and coaches in our area and across the state," he said. "We must improve our skills in each practice, match, and meet. We want to be playing our best tennis when the postseason arrives."

The Oilers will see Hoisington and Ellsworth in each of their first three tournaments. The biggest tournament of the year is likely April 25, when Central Plains will see Hesston,



The 2017 Central Plains tennis team is, back row from left: Assistant Coach Joan Klug, Devin Ryan, Kade Beck, Brett Liebl, Paxton Hammeke, Colton Potts, and Head Coach Gary Bittner. Front row: JJ Heredia, Lawson Oeser, Aaron Schneweis, Mason Wimmer, and Mason Cox. Not pictured: Andrew Meier.

(photo by Mike Courson)

Independent, Sterling, and Conway Springs, all top-five team finishers at state last spring. "All of our tournaments are important," Bittner said. "Each player needs to put in the needed work and hit the ball with confidence. They also need to be prepared for the challenges we will face."

Bittner will once again be assisted by Joan Klug. The duo

looks forward to another season of tennis. "A special thanks to the parents and fans in advance," said Bittner. "They do a wonderful job of supporting and taking care of us."



In 2016, Devin Ryan and Kade Beck made deep runs at the 3-2-1A State Tennis Championships. Ryan (left) moves to singles action and Beck (above) returns to doubles with Brett Liebl (not pictured).

(photo by Mike Courson)

Central Plains golf 2017

March 30	@Sacred Heart
April 6	@Hoisington
April 11	@St. John
April 17	HOME
April 18	@Larned
May 4	@Hutchinson
May 8	CPL @St. John
May 11	@Kinsley
May 15	Regional TBA
May 22	State

Central Plains track teams return prominent athletes from a year ago

By MIKE COURSON

Oiler athletes are used to success. Central Plains track coach Dustin Robison, back for a sixth season, is getting his track teams there. With some solid numbers this spring, Robison is planning to have athletes at the state meet in Wichita in May.

"We are looking for relays that made it to state to make a return to Wichita," Robison said of his 4x400 and 4x800 teams. "There are several boys who are working hard and competing to fill the one spot left by our lone senior from those relays last season."

"We also have several young kids who have progressed over the past year, and we look for them to have a successful season. We will also be getting back out veteran shot put thrower who sat out last season due to a shoulder

injury."

Juniors Jacob McAtee, Anthony Oberle, and Alex Barton return for the 4x400 relay. The team was ranked No. 13 in 2A last year and finished in that spot at state. The 4x800 relay with the same runners was unranked during the regular season but ran an 8:36.37 at state to place eighth.

McAtee ran his best 300m hurdle time of the year to finish 10th at state in 42.83. Six of the nine finishers ahead of McAtee last May have graduated, leaving the door wide open for a serious climb in the ranks.

Barton cleared 6-0 during the regular season but hit only 5-10 to place 12th in the high jump. Six of the 11 jumpers ahead of him have graduated, again leaving room for a medal run later this season.

"The boys only gained two freshman this season," Robison

said. "We have so many spring sports that spread our athletes out all over, it's hard to get kids out for a sport that is so challenging. All of the boys that came out this year have been working hard to make themselves better. They have strong potential for the future if they continue to work hard."

Crites returns for Lady Oilers

"We have very good numbers this year for the girls with 21 out," Robison said. "We have a broad range of experienced upperclassmen and some very talented younger girls. They have a lot of talent across the board and should be successful this season."

Gone for the Lady Oilers is Taylor Rolfs, a perennial contender in the hurdle and jumping events.

Senior Cassidy Crites returns

as a leader with a wealth of state volleyball and basketball experience. She cleared 5-0 in the high jump last year to climb to No. 7 in the 2A rankings. She cleared 4-10 at state to place 11th. Five of the top-10 finishers from that state group have graduated.

The Lady Oilers were ranked No. 10 in the 4x100m relay last year, and No. 16 in the 4x400, though neither relay advanced to state. Some new faces will look to keep those events, as well as others, strong in 2017.

"The girls gained five freshman, three sophomores, one junior, one senior that were previously not out," Robison said. "We have been thrilled with their performances so far in practices. This group of girls has some strong talent, and all of the girls out are ready to prove how hard they are willing

to work."

Robison is looking forward to seeing his kids improve each meet. In track, he said, it's not necessarily about the finishes but about that improvement.

"Track is not easy and it takes special kids to come out and compete even if they don't win a medal," he said. "It's a sport that teaches kids how to have mental toughness and that hard work pays off. We don't judge our kids on how many medals we bring home. Even though medals are great, we look for personal improvements from every track meet."

"Not every kid has the mentality to handle the pressure of competing in track and field. Track is a sport, excluding relays, that is a test of a kid's athleticism against another. We are looking forward to seeing how well our kids progress throughout the season."

Central Plains tennis 2017

March 30	@Hoisington
April 4	@Ellsworth
April 13	@Ellsworth
April 14	@Newton
April 20	@Hoisington
April 25	@Hesston
April 27	@Pratt
May 1	HOME
May 6	Regionals TBA
May 12-13	State

Central Plains track 2017

March 30	@LaCrosse
April 4	@Ellinwood JV
April 7	@Lyons
April 11	@Ellsworth
April 18	@Russell
April 25	@Hoisington
May 2	@Tescott
May 5	@Ellinwood
May 11	CPL@LaCrosse
May 19	Regional TBA
May 26-27	State @Wich. State

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