

Great Bend football team must overcome big losses at skill positions

By MIKE COURSON

Erin Beck walked into a loaded football team last fall. A first-year head coach in Great Bend, Beck led the Panthers to a 10-2 record that included a run all the way to the state semifinals. This season, Beck must fill some big shoes after losing several of his top skill players to graduation.

"That year one, everything is just a whirlwind," Beck said. "It's good to be in here around these coaches and kids for a full year. I feel way more prepared. I'm very excited about the 2017 Panthers."

"We still have a lot of question marks but we're going to lean heavily on our defense. We have six returners back from a defense that got better as the year went. We will rely heavily on them early as we see who is going to step up in those skill positions."

Three of Great Bend's top players from a year ago have moved on to Fort Hays State University. Topping that listquarterback Jacob Murray, who threw for 2,281 yards and 23 touchdowns, and rushed for another 1,322 yards and 26 scores a year ago. He also helped quarterback the West team to a win at the Kansas Shrine Bowl.



Above: Erin Beck led the Panthers to a 10-2 record in his first year as head coach in 2016. Right: Junior Koy Brack (12) makes the move from wideout to quarterback for the 2017 season.

(photos by Mike Courson)

Junior Koy Brack steps into fill those shoes. Brack saw limited time under center last year with 118 yards on 3-of-4 passing. Brack was a bigger threat at wideout with 471 yards and three touchdowns on 42 receptions.

"They're definitely some big shoes to fill," Brack said. "I'm just trying to do the best I can to help my team. It should be a really good year."

Wideout Bryce Lytle paced the Panthers with 1,035 yards on 75 receptions. He has also moved on to FHSU. Braden Smith caught 33 passes for 692

yards last season. Beck will be without his top-three receivers from a year ago.

"We have our starting wide receiver sliding into our quarterback position," said Beck. "Other than that, we're pretty young. We have a couple sophomores who will play at running back, and some seniors who will be really good wide receivers but just don't have varsity experience. Dalton Bieker and Ty Esfeld will be looked to for leadership."

Missing out of the backfield, Cal Marshall was another 1,000-yard rusher, coming in at just



under 1,100 yards last season.

Beck does have some leadership up front via a healthy dose of returners on the offensive line. "We return four of five starters on our offensive line, anchored by Aaron Clark, our senior left tackle," he said. "We're excited about that group."

Defensively, the top-two Panther tacklers have graduated in Payton Mauler (163 tackles) and Jensen Randall (114 tackles). Sophomore Dalton Miller recorded 111 varsity tackles in his freshman campaign. Great Bend opens the

2017 season on the road in Coffeyville on Sept. 1. In week two, the Panthers

jump into Western Athletic Conference play on the road at rival Hays.

Great Bend football 2017

Sept. 1	@Coffeyville
Sept. 8	@Hays
Sept. 15	WICHITA NW
Sept. 22	@Dodge City
Sept. 29	WICHITA WEST
Oct. 6	WICHITA EAST
Oct. 13	LIBERAL
Oct. 20	@Garden City
Oct. 27	Playoffs TBA

Lady Lions finish third at home invite

By MIKE COURSON

The fall sports season is officially underway. Last Thursday, the Lyons tennis team played host to four other schools in a small invite.

Chaparral won the invite with 14 points. Ashland scored 13 points, and the Lady Lions placed third with 12 points. Lyons had just three varsity players in action. The Great Bend JV squad scored eight points.

Sophomore Kristina Head had a big day at No. 1 singles, finishing her first meet of the season with a perfect 4-0 record. She defeated her first two opponents 6-2, then edged Pratt 6-4. She beat Ashland 6-4 in her final set of the day.

Lyons seniors Kelsey Jenkins and Gia Bryant posted a 2-2 record for third at No. 1 doubles. The duo opened with a 6-4 win against Great Bend, then dropped a 6-2 set against the champs from Chaparral. After a 6-0 win against Pratt, Jenkins and Bryant dropped their final match of the day 6-4 to Ashland.

Great Bend's Priscilla Ramirez posted a 1-3 record at No. 1 singles with a 7-5 win against Chaparral. Mollie Phillips went 1-2 in contested matches at No. 2 singles with a 7-5 win over Chaparral.

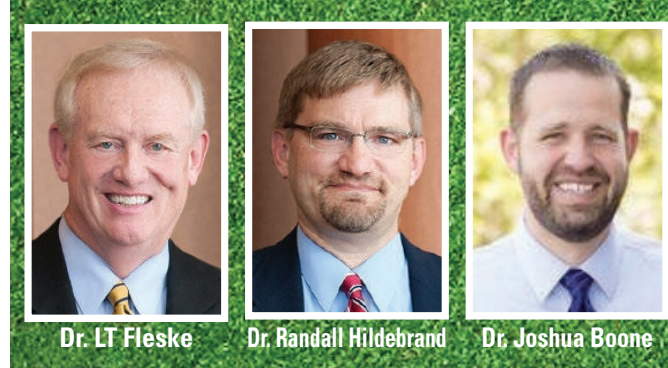
The No. 1 doubles team of Mindy Wittig and Alyssia Strickland went 1-3, and the No. 2 doubles team of Audrey Muth and Katherine Snapp went 1-2.



Lyons senior Kelsey Jenkins teamed up with senior Gia Bryant for last Thursday's season-opener at home. (photo by Mike Courson)



Lyons senior Gia Bryant returns a volley at No. 1 doubles during Thursday's invite. (photo by Mike Courson)



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