

# Mustangs boys looking to stay with league powers; Macksville girls rebuild

By MIKE GILMORE

Veteran Macksville boys basketball coach Jeff Kuckelman hopes that strength of schedule from last year's 15-7 season will carry over into the upcoming one.

"With all our losses to ranked teams last season, we hope those tough losses have prepared us for this season and the experience will benefit us," Kuckelman noted.

Among those seven losses, two were to rival perennial state qualifier and Central Prairie League foe St. John and two were to CPL contender Central Plains, the latter ending the 'Stangs' season with a 64-62, overtime heart-breaker in semifinals of their Class 2A substate.

This year, the Mustangs face more of the same – hopefully, with better results.

"We again face several strong opponents this season, but hope that we can beat those quality opponents this year. Our kids had a good summer and got better as we attended team camp at Oklahoma State, beating several quality teams there.

"With three returning starters and help from some players that got better on junior varsity, we are hoping for a strong season."

The Mustangs lost three top players in Brigdon Russell, Diego Delgadillo and Jarrod Kuckelman. Delgadillo led the squad last season with 14.7 points per game – mostly from three-point range. Russell added 11.3 ppg.

However, Jacob Rein returns as a 6-2 senior shooting guard, who averaged 14.5 points, 4

rebounds, 2.5 assists and 1.8 steals a game. Kreed Parr, a 5-10 senior point guard, brings back 4.0 points, 3.0 rebounds, 2.1 assists and 2.4 steals from last season and Karson Waters, a 6-3 junior averaged 9.5 points, 5.5 rebounds, 1.1 assists and 1.7 steals.

Adding in 6-3 junior forward Kaleb Lickiss, (3.7 ppgs., 3.7) and Kody Mead, a 6-4 junior transfer, the Mustangs look to be a little longer and more aggressive under the basket than in past seasons.

Other returnees include Darien Miller, 5-11 junior guard; Trevor Freeman, 5-9 senior guard; Alex Freeman, 5-9 senior guard; and Brandon Ibarra, 5-10 senior forward, who bring floor experience to the bench.

Opening up against Ness City at home, the Mustangs then travel to Larned for some quality local competition in the Gene Keady Classic Tournament next week in Larned. Strong pre-holiday showings will give the Mustangs fuel for another fiery CPL slate, Kuckelman said.

"St. John will be tough as will Central Plains, which did not lose hardly any players," Kuckelman noted. "Ness City lost a very key player to graduation, but has been strong in the junior high and junior varsity for several years.

"Otis-Bison has its best player returning a year older and stronger and La Crosse always has tough, hard-nosed players that battle you every game.

"Ellinwood graduated a very good player, so they will have to find someone to step up for them and Victoria is coming off a tough season, but played

a ton of underclassmen. Kinsley has nearly everyone back and will be improved."

**Mustang girls set goals** – Macksville girls' coach Chet Skinner's squad will hit the hard-court with a new look.

"The 2017-18 season will see a new Lady Mustang team," Skinner said. "We replace four starters and five seniors."

Lyset Ibarra, who averaged 5.3 ppg. at guard, returns, as does Jenna Russell, who averaged 3.0 ppg.

"We will have to find new ways to score this year different from recent years," Skinner said. "We have a good group of underclassmen that have stepped up into more of a leadership role.

"This Central Prairie League is a tough league; every game will be a battle. Our team should be eight or nine deep, which will help us early in the year to gain experience and keep our legs fresh come February and March."

Skinner noted that Ibarra and center Denise Galan will be looked to for floor leadership during the season.



2017-18 Macksville Mustang basketball team



2017-18 Macksville Lady Mustang basketball team

## Some of state's best line up this winter



By MIKE COURSON

Ready for the long haul? Football makes for some of the fastest three months of the year. Basketball slows things down but having some great teams in the area should make for an exciting season.

First things first, thanks to everyone who helped with this year's section. In the past, I've made the rounds to get team photos. This year, unable to do so, I leaned on so many schools and received so many responses: Lisa Crites at Central Plains, Matt Schultz at Hoisington, Trey Look and Chad Lafferty in Little River, Amanda Dawson and the coaches in Lyons, Derek Schoenthaler in Ellinwood, Brent Clark and staff at Chase...and Karen Starr in the office who always gives me names.

Derek Schneider and Jill Rowland in Sterling sent over pictures.

Thank you to Hugo Gonzalez, Christopher Ball, and Coach Dan Schmidt for the cover and cover story. I hope I did Christopher and his brothers justice with that story. Those kids have done some incredible things.

I hope all the team photos and great responses from our coaches makes for another strong section.

Years ago, I recall printing my first special section for another paper.

Having this and that printed in the paper before, I was no newcomer to having my name in print, but it'd always been my opinion. I stayed in the office late that night to collect a few copies.

Working with so many people and getting so many names out there is still exciting. The Thursday morning after these things are printed, I beeline to the office to make sure "my baby" looks okay.

Last year, two of our special sections placed see **Thoughts**, page 19

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