

## Thoughts

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first and third in our division of the Kansas Press Association Awards. The results are not in yet for 2017, but I'm hopeful our Fall Sports Preview collects another. Who knows, maybe this one will make some noise as well.

But enough about that. What an incredible lineup we have this winter. Here are some things to watch for:

**- Emily Ryan in Central Plains.** Many years ago I must have been afraid of driving. Because of that, I never saw Jackie Stiles play in Claflin or elsewhere.

It would be irresponsible to call the sophomore Ryan the second coming of Jackie, but she may be the closest thing we'll see in a while.

The Lady Oilers have been so good for so long

it's easy to take some of that for granted. I'm curious to see what happens in Claflin this season. I once watched Reagan Phelan do something Jackie-esque with 26 points in a single quarter. Emily is capable of doing something similar. And how many points would she score if she had to play hard for four quarters?

**- KSHSAA gets it right.** But only by accident. For the past four seasons, we've watched St. John and Central Plains dominate in Class 2A. Three of those four years, the two teams had to duke it out in sub-state, denying one of the best teams in the classification an opportunity to play at state.

The state's hand was forced this year by enrollment numbers, but at least

that problem has been alleviated. The Oilers and Tigers will still play at least twice, and those games are fun. But with any luck, both will also have the opportunity to make state title runs in their respective classifications.

**- Ball goes for three.** Like with the Lady Oilers, watching the Ball brothers win state titles in Hoisington becomes something to take for granted. Christopher will be a heavy favorite to three-peat at 152 pounds in February.

The more interesting thing to watch for with the Hoisington wrestling program is the team finish. Norton returns plenty of firepower and Scott City returns to Class 3A as the No. 2 team. Those two schools have won the last eight Class 3-2-1A team titles - Norton with seven of them, including the last five.

As dominant as those programs have been, Hoisington has been right there with them and could be again later this winter. Unlike basketball or football, where teams truly go head-to-head, a lot of points can be made or lost simply by position in the state bracket. For that reason, this year's state title race remains intriguing.

**- Sterling is healthy.** Last year I made a boo boo by putting Sterling on the cover. Not that the kids weren't deserving, but Kenan Comley was not able to heal in time to play. We were optimistic at the time we made the cover.

This year the Black Bears are healthy. Tyler Comley has graduated but I still think that should be one of the top programs in an always-tough Class 3A. Sterling enters the season unranked and gets a quick

test in the opener against Hillsboro. I hope we'll see really fast how good that team is going to be this year.

**- Stay safe out there.** After watching Fort Hays State University get beat in the playoffs last Saturday, I stuck around and covered the Class 2-1A state championship game for Catch it Kansas. Immediately upon leaving Hays, I saw a deer that had been hit.

Traveling to Lindsborg two weeks before and to Phillipsburg the week after that, I had my own close encounters with deer. They're definitely out there.

Sunday after the season ended, I saw the disturbing story of the Sabetha family killed in a head-on crash. Tanner and Carson Ukele were part of Sabetha's state championship team that narrowly defeated Marysville 7-6 in Hutchinson. Before the brothers even made it home, they learned their mother, little sister, and uncle had been killed in a crash. Their father was critically injured but survived.

We've mostly caught breaks in Barton County with relatively few accidents like this. Just a couple years ago, Rice County lost four teenagers in the space of 365 days. I interviewed the three families of teens still in high school. Quite a daunting task for a guy who would rather write about sports, but a kid will always be more than a headline and I wanted to share those stories.

Especially early in the winter season, be extra careful driving those rural Kansas roads. Be extra vigilant with your sight - use those high beams and stay off the phone.

## Brackets

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2017 Morris-Stephens Classic  
 Dec. 4-9  
 At Lincoln  
**GIRLS' BRACKET**  
 Dec. 4  
 Russell vs. Phillipsburg, 7:15 p.m. LES  
 Lincoln vs. Plainville, 5:45 p.m. LHS  
 Dec. 5  
 Ellsworth vs. Nickerson, 5:45 p.m. LHS  
 Ell-Saline vs. Central Plains, 7:15 p.m. LES  
 Dec. 8  
 Consolation  
 Russell-Phillipsburg loser vs. Lincoln-Plainville loser, 7 p.m. LES  
 Ellsworth-Nickerson loser vs. Ell-Saline-Central Plains loser, 4 p.m. LES  
 Semifinals  
 Russell-Phillipsburg winner vs. Lincoln-Plainville winner, 7 p.m. LHS  
 Ellsworth-Nickerson winner vs. Ell-Saline-Central Plains winner, 4 p.m. LHS  
 Dec. 9  
 Championship  
 Semifinal winners, 5 p.m. LHS  
 Third place  
 Semifinal losers, 2 p.m. LHS  
 Fifth place  
 Consolation winners, 5 p.m. LES  
 Seventh place  
 Consolation losers, 2:15 p.m. LES  
**BOYS' BRACKET**  
 Dec. 4  
 Russell vs. Phillipsburg, 5:45 p.m. LES  
 Lincoln vs. Plainville, 7:15 p.m. LHS  
 Dec. 5  
 Ellsworth vs. Nickerson, 7:15 p.m. LHS  
 Ell-Saline vs. Central Plains, 5:45 p.m. LES  
 Dec. 8  
 Consolation  
 Russell-Phillipsburg loser vs. Lincoln-Plainville loser, 8:30 p.m. LES  
 Ellsworth-Nickerson loser vs. Ell-Saline-Central Plains loser, 5:30 p.m. LES  
 Semifinals  
 Russell-Phillipsburg winner vs. Lincoln-Plainville winner, 8:30 p.m. LHS  
 Ellsworth-Nickerson winner vs. Ell-Saline-Central Plains winner, 5:30 p.m. LHS  
 Dec. 9  
 Championship  
 Semifinal winners, 6:30 p.m. LHS  
 Third place  
 Semifinal losers, 3:30 p.m. LHS  
 Fifth place  
 Consolation winners, 6:30 p.m. LES  
 Seventh place  
 Consolation losers, 3:30 p.m. LES

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