

Lady Oilers eye state record fifth-straight state championship

By Mike Courson

Teams around Class 2A are still wondering: will there be a drop off at Central Plains? Last year, the Lady Oilers had to deal with the loss of two all-state caliber players. The result was a perfect season and fourth-straight state championship. Can the Lady Oilers again overcome some big losses to become the first team in state history to win five-straight titles?

"Success will depend on us continuing to play the Oiler Way: playing hard, and playing together by making the extra pass and sharing the ball, which we have done so well in the past," said coach Pat Stiles, who has a 123-4 record in five years with the team. "We will be extremely young and inexperienced but will continue to improve as the year goes."

Some have already doubted Central Plains' ability to dominate as the Lady Oilers enter the season ranked No. 2 in the pre-season coaches' rankings. Central Plains enters the 2017-18 season riding a 57-game win streak. The Lady Oilers have posted an incredible 103-1 record over the past four seasons.

Janae Ryan, Cassidy Crites, Kylee Kasselmann, Keeley Hipp, and Chelsey Bieberle all played a role in that run over the past four seasons, and all five are gone to graduation.

But Stiles does have back one of the top players in all of Kansas: sophomore guard Emily Ryan. As a freshman last year, Ryan proved to be a force in all aspects of the game. She loses some of her supporting cast from a year ago but still has the ability to change the outcome of ball games this winter.

"Emily is probably one of the best players in the state," Stiles said. "Very long defender, sees the floor well and has an uncanny way of getting to the rim."

Several other Lady Oilers return with varsity experience. Junior guard Avery Hurley (5-3) returns with starting experience. Senior Julie Donecker (6-0) returns as a strong post player, and sophomore Rachel Lamatsch (5-2) saw time at guard last year. Junior Rylee Cunningham (5-10) will see an increased role in 2017-18.

Without the one loss to Ellinwood in 2015, the Lady Oilers would be on the verge of breaking Hoxie's 107-game win streak this year. That record is not in question this season, but Central Plains could expand upon its already impressive 57-game win streak. With the loss of some key players around the league, the Lady Oilers should be favorites to cruise through the Central Prairie League portion of the schedule.

In recent years, the Lady Oilers have been tested at



2017-18 Central Plains Lady Oilers, front row from left: Faith Hurley, Avery Hurley, Alisha Crow, Julie Donecker, Rylee Cunningham, Destiny Hurley, and Seana Decker. Middle row: Monica Short, Rachel Lamatsch, Zoe Potter, Addison Crites, Emily Ryan, Delaney Rugan, Rebecca Stratmann, and Samantha Watkins. Back row: Callie Zink, Ryenne Cunningham, Lexi Oeser, and Jennah Jeffrey. (photo courtesy of Lisa Crites/CPHS)

the Hilltop Hoops Classic in January, and this season No. 4 Concordia (4A, Div. II) comes to Claflin. Last year's game in Concordia lined up well on paper though the Oilers earned

a running clock in a 74-39 win. The Lady Panthers return several key players, including three players who combined for 26 of the 39 points against the Lady Oilers. Senior

Cydney Bergmann leads that group as one of the top players in Class 4A.

No. 9 Larned (3A) will be an early test for the Lady Oilers on Dec. 15.

Oiler basketball 2017-18

Dec. 1	@Hoisington
Dec. 5-9	@Lincoln Tourn.
Dec. 12	@St. John
Dec. 15	@Larned
Dec. 19	SACRED HEART
Jan. 5	@Macksville
Jan. 12	VICTORIA
Jan. 16-20	@St. John Tourn. (B)
Jan. 23-26	Hilltop Tourn. (G)
Jan. 30	@Otis-Bison
Feb. 2	ST. JOHN
Feb. 3	CONCORDIA
Feb. 6	@Plainville
Feb. 9	@LaCrosse
Feb. 13	NESS CITY
Feb. 16	@Kinsley
Feb. 20	ELLINWOOD
March 1-3	Sub-state TBA
March 7-10	State

Oiler boys poised for another big season

By Mike Courson

The Central Plains boys already had plenty of good news with four starters back from a team that went 17-6 last year. This fall, the Oilers received even more good news: St. John is moving back to Class 1A.

The teams will still have to battle it out for league supremacy, but gone is the question of a possible sub-state meeting. As two of the top teams in Class 2A over the last four seasons, the two schools met in sub-state three times. In 2015, the teams avoided each other in sub-state, instead playing in a thrilling state championship game.

Even last year's 17-6 record is a bit of a



2017-18 Central Plains Oilers, front row from left: Brett Thompson, Brady Short, Brett Liebl, Alex Barton, Myles Menges, Devin Ryan, and Alex Hickel. Back row: Michael Menges, Jacob Oberle, Jovan Whiterock, Tyler Holmes, JC Radenberg, Jerred Bieberle, Dylan Kitchen, Lawson Oeser, and Ethan Hurley. Not Pictured: JJ Heredia (photo courtesy of Lisa Crites/CPHS)

misnomer: most of those losses came against the top-three seeds at the Class 2A state tournament, and another came against a Class 4A Pratt team that played at state.

Expectations will remain extremely high for the squad that posted a 25-1 record in 2015-16. Success will revolve around the four returning starters: Brett Liebl, Alex Barton, Alex Hickel, and Devin Ryan.

"We return a very talented nucleus of players," said Oiler coach Brett Rolfs said. "Brett and Alex will be a great one-two punch in the paint for us. Devin and Alex will provide great stability to our backcourt."

Liebl is just a junior but at a strong 6-2, made plenty of waves inside last year where he averaged 15.6 points and 6.8 rebounds a game. The senior Barton is an inch taller and averaged 11.8

points and 6.5 rebounds a night.

Handling the ball for the Oilers will be a pair of top-tier guards in Hickel and Ryan. Hickel averaged 14.3 points, 3.7 rebounds, and 2.5 assists a night last season. Ryan is another heady member of a family that has already provided the school with two four-year players and has two more in the works with Devin and sister, Emily. Ryan averaged 9.7 points, 3.1 rebounds, and 4.2 assists a year ago.

Junior Myles Menges (6-3) has also become a staple in Oiler athletics after transferring from Ellinwood last fall. He quarterbacked the football team to another successful season and should see an increased role on the hardwood after scoring four points a night last winter.

Central Plains, ranked No. 3 in preseason polls, will again play a tough

schedule. Sacred Heart went 25-1 a year ago, beating St. John for the 2A championship. The Knights, with star guard Caleb Jordan returning, enter the 2017-18 season ranked No. 1 in the class. Area basketball fans get an early Christmas gift as Sacred Heart rolls into Claflin for a premiere match-up on Dec. 19.

The league schedule will include battles with Ness City, ranked No. 5 in 2A; St. John, ranked No. 2 in 1A, Div. I; and Otis-Bison, ranked No. 2 in 1A, Div. II. Ness City and St. John made for a good bracket at the Mid-Winter Classic Tournament in St. John last year.

Away from the league schedule, the Oilers will host Class 4A Concordia on Feb. 3, then head to Plainville on Feb. 6. The Cardinals enter the season ranked No. 9 in 2A. That stretch kicks off with a game against St. John on Feb. 2.

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