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## Hawley Continues To Be A Competitive Ball Club This Season

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Sports Writer



The 2018 Hawley Varsity Baseball Season has begun, and it looks to continue its reputation of being a competitive ballclub this spring. With 22 players in grades 9-12, the Nuggets have plenty of personnel waiting for action. Beau Lofgren (139-115), three-time section coach of the year is now in his 16th season as the head coach in the program that began in 2003.

"This is my favorite time of the year—baseball season," Lofgren said. "Throughout the years here, our program has been blessed with tremendous young men, and this year will be no different. The boys in the dugout keep me on my toes!"

The Nuggets experienced a solid season in 2017. After a hard-luck 2016 campaign that saw Hawley finish with a 4-17 record, the locals returned to their status of being a competitive program in the Heart O' Lakes Conference and in Section 8AA.

Hawley stumbled out of the gate right away, though, with a 2-8 record after the first ten games.

"It was deja-vu all over again as we struggled the year before," noted Lofgren. "The record was not what we expected. We were playing pretty good baseball, so we just needed to stay the course."

The Nuggets did just that, winning nine of their last 10 games to end the regular season with a record of 11-9.

"In the month of May, we were as hot as anyone in the state," said Lofgren. "We had great pitching, timely hitting, and defensively we didn't let mistakes snowball. We knew we weren't the favorites coming into last year, but by the end of the season, I felt we could make a run as we were playing to our potential."

Hawley received the number five seed, playing at fourth-seeded Frazee to start the 8AA Playoffs. The Nuggets led most of the game and were up 2-1 in the 5th inning. The Hornets bunched together seven singles to score six runs in that inning, and walked away with an eventual 7-2 win to end Hawley's season.

"I was really heartbroken after that loss," Lofgren said. "The guys worked very hard and improved tremendously all year. However, we made two horrendous base running gaffes early in the game, which hurt our chances early to extend our lead. Our pitchers threw great, but Frazee's hitters found gaps and put it together in one inning. You have to give the Hornets credit. Just like that, our momentum and season were history!"

Warroad would go onto win the Section 8AA tournament, defeating Perham in the championship.

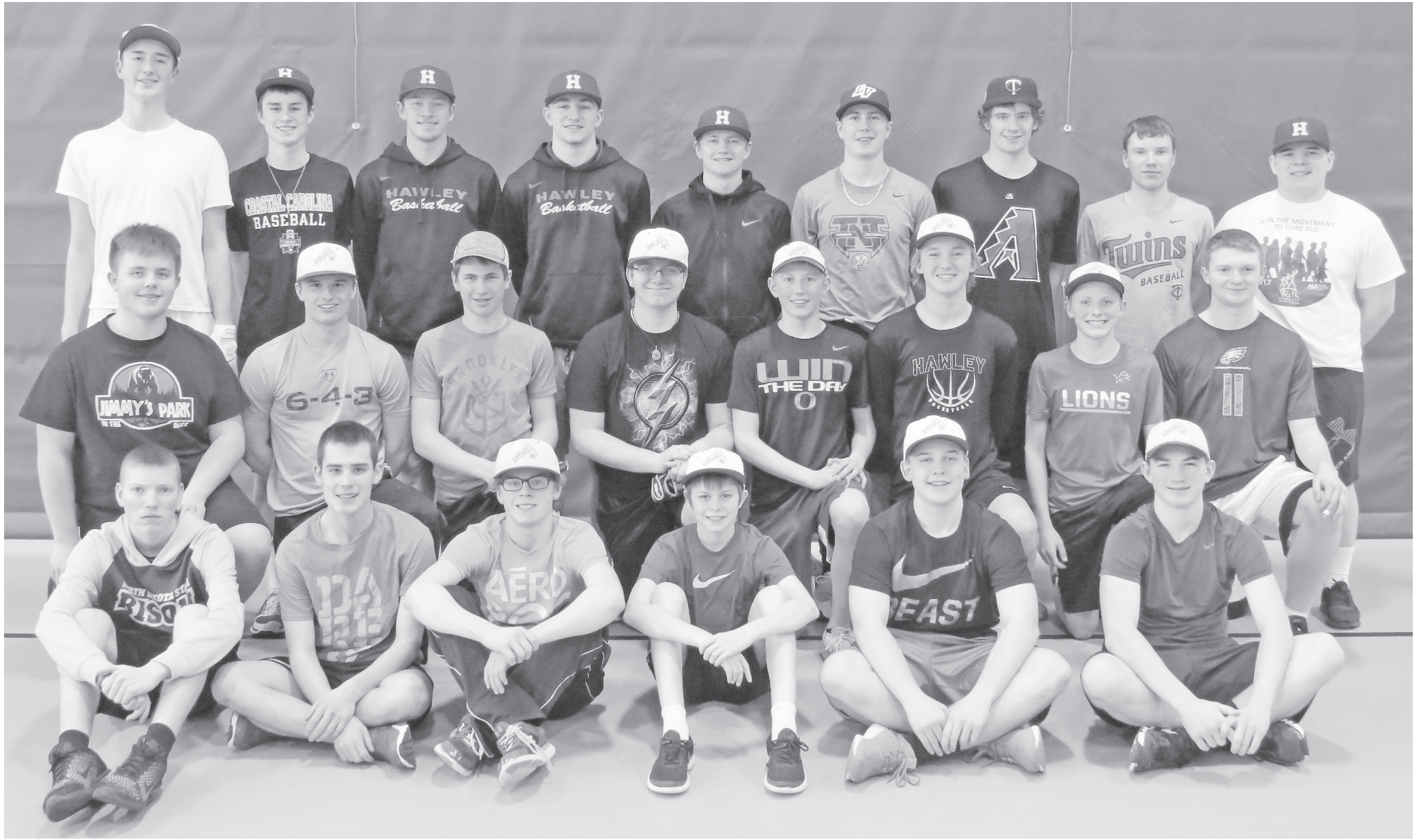
Hawley Baseball graduated four players last spring, Will Bauer, Josh Fenske, Grant Klevgaard, and Drew Thompson.

"It's been a little strange not seeing those boys around this spring," noted Lofgren. "They played varsity ball for five seasons, and they got to be a big part of what I do. All of them gave what they had each day, they put time into improving, and helped us rebound last year back to being highly competitive."

Thompson led the team in most pitching categories and played shortstop. A five-year starter and the last starting position player on Hawley's most recent state tournament team in 2014, he was named to the HOL All-Conference team in 2017.

"Drew's competitive fire will be missed," said Lofgren. "He was our innings-eater last season, having thrown twice as much as anyone else did. I'll never forget the two-hit shutout he threw against Perham last year, as that game turned our season around. I'm so happy he's continued his playing days now as a pitcher for Concordia College in Moorhead."

Josh Fenske manned left field and was a key contributor on the mound the past two seasons.



The Hawley Nugget baseball team members are, left to right, front row-Bryce Fenske, Billy Renner, Keagan Gilbert, Gavin Klevgaard, Hunter Gerner, Cole Matson; middle row-Gavin Mickelberg, Carter Langer, Michael Slette, Nick Palmer, Nathan Sperr, Cade Carley, Alex Bratsch, Derian Gerdes; back row-George Pasche, Mason Klevgaard, Gunnar Lawson, Donnie Loegering, Trayton Cossette, Harrison Nord, Connor Ness, Brady Fenske and Sam Wamre.

"Josh's biggest area of improvement was his mental toughness, which lead to his successes," Lofgren said. "He came on as a dependable pitcher for us unexpectedly, and he had a knack for making great plays in the outfield."

Fenske was named HOL Honorable Mention last year. Bauer was the team's first and third baseman over the years while Klevgaard primarily was the DH. Both players enjoyed success in their final season in Hawley.

"Will and Grant are as intelligent as it gets," Lofgren commented. "They lived and breathed baseball. Their ability to rally the guys, keep their composure, and continue to play hard while times got tough rubbed off onto other players. I miss their positive and joking personalities!"

This season, the Nuggets boast five seniors on the squad: Brady Fenske, Donnie Loegering, Connor Ness, Harrison Nord, and Sam Wamre. All five were named captains of the team this spring.

"These fellas have been through a lot of ups and downs in our program, and they each have something to offer to the squad," Lofgren said. "It was a no-brainer to have them lead us."

Loegering, a superb three-sport athlete in Hawley over the years, will be the team's top pitcher and shortstop in 2018.

"If you've never watched Donnie pitch before, I suggest you watch him this year," noted Lofgren. "He comes after you, works quickly, and has confidence oozing out of his ears."

Loegering led the team with a 1.83 ERA, going 3-1 a year ago. Lofgren hopes he can improve upon his hitting and fielding.

"His play at shortstop will be crucial to our success—he has the tools necessary to be a force out there. I expect him to rise to the occasion."

Wamre enters this season as the starting catcher for the 3rd year in a row. He threw out about 50 percent of potential base stealers and was fourth in hitting at a .255 clip.

"Wamre is as durable as one gets behind the plate. I look for him to be tough as nails again, to have a better year at the dish."

Ness will likely be in the outfield again this season after having a great junior year in 2017.

"Connor was a pleasant surprise, hitting .344 last season," Lofgren said. "He's put in tons of time in the

cage, and it paid off. We will need him to continue to put the ball in play consistently, and to be dependable in the outfield if we are to have success. I know he's ready to get after it."

Ness can be seen after practice taking additional fly balls and getting that extra work in. He is always one of the last to leave the field.

Nord also had a productive junior season, batting .344 on the year while being able to play both second base and outfield. He will likely continue that utility role again.

"Harry is a guy that all good teams need. Whatever the team needs, Nord will do. I see this on and off the field—he wants to help and get things done. He's a sure thing in the outfield, reliable in the infield, and could have a big year at the plate."

Fenske will be vying for time in the OF or DH. He's been a courtesy runner over the years as well, and could see some time there as well.

"I have the utmost respect for Brady Fenske," Lofgren said.

"Recently, Brady's father passed away, and you would never know it by talking with him. I can't imagine how hard this has to be on Brady and his wonderful family. Fenske has always been a team player, he's done what I've asked, he never complains, he helps others, and he's about as nice a kid as you'll ever meet. We are blessed to have Brady on our team."

The four juniors on the squad will all play important roles on varsity again this year. Mason Klevgaard, Gunnar Lawson, George Pasche, and Trayton Cossette all earned varsity letters and started in 2017. Klevgaard will be called upon to pitch, play second base and possibly some shortstop.

"Mason had a nice sophomore season on the mound," Lofgren said.

"He was second with a 2.52 ERA and earned big wins in Ada and against the HOL champions in Barnesville last year. Mason has spent more time developing his pitching game than most players have. I am counting on him to take his game to the next level."

Lawson will look to play third, possibly some first, and he's the backup catcher.

"Gunnar Lawson epitomizes common sense and hard work. This kid is blue-collar all the way, let's his play do the talking, and wants to improve. He was sort of a platoon player a year ago, which his hard to do, but he will be on the field for every game this year."

Pasche might be the dark horse of the team, and he's looking to have a great 2018. He will start at first base and will also look to land a spot in the rotation.

"George is by far the most enthusiastic player I've coached on the baseball field," Lofgren said with a smile. "I admire that passion and attention to detail he has. He's very good with the glove at first and is aggressive at the plate. He played fall ball last year, and he is bigger and stronger."

Cossette just might be the best player in the area as he returns for this third season on varsity. He will play center and pitch for the Nuggets.

"Tray put up big numbers as a sophomore last year. He led our team in batting average, on-base percentage, runs, hits, walks, stolen bases, extra base hits, and plate appearances. I don't have any doubts at all about what he will do offensively or defensively. He struggled last spring on the mound, but has great potential. He will be ready this year to step up."

This year's team has 11 sophomores as well: Derian Gerdes,

Nate Sperr, Bryce Fenske, Carter Langer, Nick Palmer, Michael Slette, Cole Matson, Hunter Gerner, Gavin Mickelberg, Keagan Gilbert, and Cade Carley. Some of these boys will have a chance to crack the varsity lineup.

"We always need guys that can pitch, play infield spots, and catchers," Lofgren said. "There is talent in this group. We will wait and see who rises to the occasion."

These players, along with some of the freshman, will make up the JV squad.

"It's a nice luxury to have all these awesome guys back out again," Lofgren noted.

The team is rounded out with newcoming freshmen Alex Bratsch, Billy Renner, and Gavin Klevgaard.

"Alex, Billy, and Gavin have all bought into what we're doing at practice. I appreciate how they've jumped right in and worked."

Lofgren will again be assisted by Keith Hanson, who's been the assistant since 2010, has many years of experience as an umpire, and has been a longtime member and manager of the Ada A's amateur baseball team.

"I can't believe Coach Hanson has survived this long with me," Lofgren joked. "We are very opposite in the way we do our business, but I'm thankful to have those differences of philosophies. I believe that is why we work so well together. He's clear, concise, and tells it how it is to the players. It's up to the players to take it or leave it. He gets through to the kids and is the best at taking care of all the field maintenance tasks."

The Nuggets will enjoy having junior high baseball for the fifth year in a row. Steve Pasche returns for his fifth season and Kyle Kopacek is back for his fourth. They will coach the 7th-8th grade teams.

"Steve and Kyle are terrific coaches, and they will provide excellent instruction and discipline to the 22 kids that have signed up to play. We appreciate each and every player in our program. I look forward working with Steve, Kyle, and seeing all these 7th- and 8th-graders in baseball!"

Last summer, the American Legion team placed third out of 20 teams in the District 9 tournament while the 13 Babe Ruth team advanced to the state tournament last summer. The 14-15 Babe Ruth team also enjoyed a successful season.

"These positive summer experiences should only bolster our

kids' confidence," Lofgren said. "If you live in the past, you die in the past, so the kids need to be present in everything they do. However, they know they're capable of big things. They need to work day in and day out to achieve their goals. It won't be handed to them."

Lofgren believes DGF, followed by Frazee and Perham, to be the top teams in the HOL Conference. "That's what I'm guessing, but believe me, I'm no expert. Every team will be better, and call me crazy, but I seriously believe each team in our conference has a chance to go to state in their respective section. That's how deep our conference is. A lot of HOL teams didn't graduate any seniors, so it's going to be a battle!"

Warroad and Roseau will be teams to contend for the Section 8AA title.

"The competition in the HOL and Section 8AA never lets down," Lofgren said. "Last year, Barnesville won the HOL and was 9-3. We split with them. Perham finished runner up in Section 8AA last year, and we split with them as well. Flash ahead to this season, I see no team as a clear-cut favorite. It will be interesting to see what unfolds. Anyone can beat anyone at anytime, especially in baseball. No matter what teams' records are, everyone has at least one pitcher that can flat out throw and beat you. That's why you play the games and throw records out the window come playoff time."

Lofgren concluded, "As always, the number one goal for our kids is to control what they can control. Attitude, effort, enthusiasm, and respect are all things we as humans have control over. If you can't deal with adversity, then life will not be much fun, and baseball will be the least of your worries down the road. We had a tough start to our season with this ugly weather preventing us from being outside, but with hard times comes greater opportunities to show growth. I hope we're up for the challenge. With hard work, energy, and a positive mindset, we will be able to compete night in and night out. Once we play some games, we'll have a better idea of what to improve upon. A season is full of peaks and valleys, but the goal is to peak at the end. Hopefully, we can do that again this spring. I know one thing for sure —no team will have more fun than us. Cheers to a memorable 2018 on the diamond!"

