

# Villanueva, Hollinger return to lead Lady Lions

**By MIKE COURSON**  
Last season, Lady Lions softball coach Marlin Clark was cautiously optimistic about a fifth-straight trip to state. Both sides prevailed as Lyons finished with a winning 14-8 record but missed that trip to state.

This year, Clark is in a similar situation: the optimism is there, but the Lady Lions are again dealing with some key losses.

"We will have to wait and see," Clark said. "We will be young and inexperienced. We have some goals, but it is too early to tell if they are realistic."

Clark lost four seniors to graduation, including three all-league players. With so much success starting in the circle, the biggest loss will likely be that of four-year player Ruth Pineda, a first-team all-CKL selection last year. She threw 70 of the team's 118 innings last year, striking out 66 and allowing 30 earned runs.

Also gone are Jessica

Smith at second base and Fiona Jaime in the outfield - both were second-team all-league picks. Jaime's .515 batting average led the team, and Smith finished at .390 with four doubles last year. Katie Marshall also provided a big bat with a .375 average and six doubles last year as a senior. Pineda batted .396.

Lyons does return five varsity starters, including two more all-leaguers. Senior Alexis Villanueva was a first-team all-CKL selection at first base after batting .481 and driving in a team-high 33 runs.

At the other corner of the infield, senior Bailey Hollinger returns with plenty of varsity experience. She added 60 points to her batting average last year, finishing at .438 with team highs in doubles (6) and home runs (2). Her 26 RBIs were second most on the 2017 squad.

Other starters for Clark include junior Logan Griffitt, junior Ashley Fi-

erro, and sophomore Daci Stover. Griffitt's return is a crucial one as she batted .393 last season with four doubles and 15 RBIs.

More important, Griffitt pitcher her way to a 6-3 record in 10 appearances. She struck out 20 and allowed 34 earned runs in her 48 innings of work.

Stover batted .263 for Lyons last year but still drove in 16 runs, and Fi-

erro batted at a .224 clip.

Like last season, Clark will be relying a lot on some younger players to fill big shoes left by a big graduating class.

"Again our practices will determine what we do," he said. "We have freshmen and sophomores who will have to step up. They will not be able to play like freshmen and sophomores."

## Lyons softball 2018

March 27	HOISINGTON
April 3	@Hesston
April 10	@Nickerson
April 17	HALSTEAD
April 20	@Kingman
April 24	@Hillsboro
April 27	HAVEN
May 1	@Smoky Valley
May 4	PRATT
May 8	LARNED
May 14-18	Regional
May 24-25	State



**Bailey Hollinger**

# Six seniors should make Sterling a golf power

**By MIKE COURSON**

The Sterling golf team has had its share of success in recent seasons. The Black Bears placed second as a team in 2015, fourth in 2016, and seventh last season. With six returning varsity players back, Sterling could again push for some serious state hardware later this spring.

Gone to graduation is Dallas Lackey, who led the Black Bears during a regional championship run. He went on to place 42nd at state.

Leading the returners is senior Zach Schissler, who tied for seventh place at last year's state meet before falling to 10th in a large playoff. Five of the golfers who finished ahead of Schissler have graduated to leave the door open for a big finish in his prep career.

Senior Lucas Weigel finished 30th overall at state last season, and senior Lucas Briar capped the top-50 at state. Head coach Dale Rose expects Weigel to climb the ranks this season. Other seniors on this year's squad include James McNutt and Peter Settle.

"We hope to have much improved players but will have to use a freshman or two," Rose said. "We just hope to compete."

Fredonia and Hesston went head-to-head for the title last year with just one stroke separating the two squads atop the Class 3A leaderboard. Hesston graduates two of its top-three players from a year ago, and Fredonia graduated its top-two players who finished in the top-12 at state. State champion Jacob Huffaker from Southeast of Saline should be back for a senior season. Runner-up Will Kullot of Syracuse will take his talents to Class 2A as his school moves back down for 2018.

# Graduation leaves big shoes to fill for Lyons track team

**By MIKE COURSON**  
Samantha Trejo, Cassie Loesch, Oscar Jaime. That trio has kept the Lyons track team on the map in recent seasons. With all three gone to graduation in 2018, coach James Johnston will look for other athletes to fill the void.

Trejo was a state medal contender in each of her four years at Lyons. Last May, she made the state podium in two events with a fifth-place finish in the 3200m run and an eighth-place finish in the 1600.

Loesch had top-five shot put and discus throws during the regular season last spring. Jaime placed 12th in a tough 1600m

field at state.

Looking to 2018, Lyons has one returning state qualifier in senior Julianne Snyder. She ran a 66.62 400m dash at state to place 15th. Three of the top-four finishers in that field have graduated, meaning a new state champion and runner up will be crowned in May.

Lyons senior Julianne Snyder placed sixth in the 400m dash at the Central Kansas League meet in Hillsboro last spring (pictured). She went on to place in the event at state. Snyder is the lone returning state qualifier for Lyons this spring.

(photo by Mike Courson)



# Lots of changes make this spring exciting to cover



**By MIKE COURSON**  
If our Fall Sports Previews are the easiest to put together, our spring sections are the most difficult: extended basketball seasons, Spring Break, spring weather... all of the above made it difficult to impossible to round up the usual photos. Thanks to all the coaches and helpers who assisted in getting pictures for most of the

teams.

With more space, I could perhaps detail some of the big track and field names from around the state. With about half a week's worth of rankings in the books, there have already been some great marks. That always makes for a fun spring and state track meet once things warm up for good.

For the last two years, the Ellinwood girls have been one of my final teams going. This year, the Lady Eagles have a new head coach in Jordan Haney, and lots of new players. Haney, back at Great Bend High, was one of the first kids I ever covered so fun to have that come full circle.

Some of my favorite kids are gone to graduation: Sam Trejo's dad was

always near the track in Lyons; Joanna Strecker was a great competitor; the Pineda girls are all done with the Lyons softball program.

But we do have some great kids and athletes back. Obviously, Sterling's Taya Wilson is expected to do great things. Several Lady Black Bears and Sterling boys should be eyeing state medals.

Perhaps my biggest regret of this section is no team photo of the Central Plains boys' tennis team. They've finished first and second at state the last two seasons and return five state qualifiers. If you can get out and watch them play this spring, that's a worthy endeavor.

Last year, the Sterling boys cruised to the state

title and Hoisington had some kids in the mix. It would be great to see our area schools again have success against some of the eastern Kansas powerhouses.

Watch for some Otis-Bison kids to make some noise at the state track meet later this spring. Blake Bahr has been a perennial medal contender in the sprints, and the girls' 4x800 was good last year. Missing in action will be Taylor Regan, another one of our top athletes over the past four years.

Finally, just good luck to all the new coaches. We try our best to get you in so get your results as soon as you can. I hope you can give us lots of good news over the next two months.

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