

## Tigers

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**Season outlook** – Pawnee Heights will be playing a full eight-game slate in the association's Southern Division. With newcomers Rolla, Moscow and Ashland joining Deerfield, Fowler and Pawnee Heights, the South is capable of producing the 2018 state champion.

The North Division features Weskan, Cheylin, Golden Plains, Natoma and Western Plains. Postseason begins with a top-six playoff bracket with the top seeds receiving byes. This year's season is a week longer, with the championship scheduled for Nov. 10 in Dodge City.

Golden Plains, with 15 returning lettermen, looks to be the North Division favorite for a state berth this season. The Bulldogs, under longtime coach Travis Smith, return all but four of their team rushing yards this season.

Meanwhile, "We are looking forward to the season, but nothing is a given," Chambers said. "There are no 'gimme' games. With all the great teams coming in, it's going to be a tossup as to who comes out on top."

Here's a look at the Pawnee Heights scheduled opponents:

Western Plains at Pawnee Heights, Aug. 31 – As the first game goes, so goes the season. The Bobcats finished 2017 with an 0-8 record and the Tigers opened the season with a 51-0 rout, but Chambers isn't looking past anyone. "It's important that we get our focus early and keep it," he said.

Pawnee Heights at Weskan, Sept. 7 – Weskan ran the table in the 2016 season, beating the Tigers 38-18 in the title game. Last year, the Coyotes went 7-3 and advanced to the bowl game undercard, beating Golden Plains 44-27. Weskan has all state junior quarterback Jace Mackey and a winning drive.

Cheylin at Pawnee Heights, Sept. 14 – Paybacks are hell, and Cheylin running back Manuel Castillo returns as a 5-8, 160 senior. Last year, the Tigers held Castillo to 101 yards on 19 carries in the title game, but he posted 1,498 yards on 161 totes as a ju-

nior while Cheylin finished the season 6-3. The Cougars return four seniors on their 15-man roster and it's a sure bet they all remember last November.

Pawnee Heights at Ashland, Sept. 21 – Pawnee Heights meets its first wild card in Blue Jays territory. Ashland, as a six-man newcomer, went 1-8 last year in their final eight-man season, beating Chase 56-26 in district play under coach Jesse Stebens.

Ashland, with first-year coach Ben Fox, may be new to six-man, but not to postseason success. They won 11-man state titles in 1976 and 1980, and their move to eight-man produced 21 playoff appearances in the past 37 years, with six berths in the semifinals. In the Southern Plains-Iroquois Activities Association, the Tigers split their last two meetings, with Ashland winning 66-58 in 2004 and Pawnee Heights winning 28-12 in 2005. First-year PHHS assistant Dale Coverdale knows them well, having served as an assistant in the Blue Jays' program.

Fowler at Rozel, Sept. 28 – The Goldbugs' season could be in doubt, due to numbers issues. Currently there are 12 players on the roster with five seniors, coming back from a 2-7 season. Pawnee Heights blanked Fowler 63-0 last year.

Pawnee Heights at Deerfield, Oct. 5 – The Spartans went 0-8 last season.

Moscow at Pawnee Heights, Oct. 12 – Homecoming for the Tigers this week against the Wildcats could be a barnburner. Another wild card, Moscow went 3-4 in its last season of the eight-man Santa Fe Trail League, but recorded some big wins in their last three games: 86-0 against Deerfield; 48-0 over Minneola and 52-6 over Rolla. Good thing this game is on Tiger turf, with their fans behind them.

Pawnee Heights against Rolla, Oct. 19 – Rolla went 2-7 last year in eight-man. The Pirates' 16-player roster is young, with three seniors; more than half the team is incoming freshmen.

## Eight thinclads rostered for Larned XC season

By MIKE GILMORE

The girls portion of the Larned Cross Country team won its first-ever Central Kansas League team title in 2017.

They won't be defending it this year.

With the roster formed heading into Saturday's season-opening meet at Thomas More Prep-Marian in Hays, the girls' team sports four runners – one short of a team score.

That doesn't mean that the girls won't be training or competing as hard as last year. There are still individual medals to think about.

"It's disappointing that we don't have enough to compete as a team," noted veteran coach Gary Wagner, whose last girls' team trophy was in 2009, before last season. "We sure want to compete as best we can at league."

The CKL is known as a cross-country league, especially among the boys. Halstead is the reigning 3A boys team champ, with Kingman finishing fifth and Hesston 11th on the Rim Rock course in Lawrence. Although Kingman isn't in the CKL any longer, they still have two runners coming back as seniors who will be running under 17 minutes at state.

"You have a lot of good runners in this league, boys and girls," Wagner noted. "Teams that compete for state titles at Classes 3A and 4A."

Last October, five Lady Indians combined for 39 points, edging Smoky Valley's 42 for the league trophy. Cierra Nord led the Lady Indian pack with a fourth-place finish of 22 minutes, 27 seconds. Next was MaKayla Leiker in 14th at 23:37.0; Brooke Butler, 16th at 24:11.0; Ivory Muldrow, 18th, 25:06 and Alijah Stokes, 19th, 25:22.0.

Stokes, who moved away, and Muldrow, whose knee injury from last basketball season hasn't been cleared for athletic competition yet this fall, are off the 2018 girls' roster. Even with Aylis Clawson coming in as a freshman, that still leaves the Lady Indians one runner short.

Wagner, however, imparts the same goal he has done for the past two decades of coaching: get better every day. "That's No. 1," he said. "We've got two girls coming back that were all-CKL (Nord and Leiker, both ju-



**LARNED CROSS COUNTRY** – The 2018 Larned High School varsity cross country team, front row from left: MaKayla Leiker, Cierra Nord, Aylis Clawson, Brooke Butler. Back row: Colton Drimmel, Brayden Lothman, Ethan Haas and Ian Orth. (photo by Mike Gilmore)

niors) and we have Brooke Butler who will be in her fourth year running for us. It's up to Brooke to be our leader, whether or not she's our No. 1 runner. She will need to lead by example, lead at practice, be a team leader at meets.

"Clawson will be running her first 5K in competition, but she's already a solid runner. She's consistent, she's grown a lot," Wagner said.

**Boys' quartet** – On the boys' side, sophomore Brayden Lothman will head four boys on the varsity course. Lothman, who has PR'd at 17:30, led the Indians last year at league to a fifth place team finish with a time of 18:33. "This should be his year," Wagner said. "He got a little more focused during track season and he's learning to enjoy being pushed a little more."

He is joined by sophomore Ethan Haas, who finished 37th at league last season at 20:26.0. Colton Drimmel is a junior and Ian Orth is an incoming freshman.

"Everyone is running for their own times this season, but we want to be competitive, we want to represent

wherever we go," Wagner noted.

Big home meet – The Indians will be hosting the Abby Trapp Prescott Invitational meet again this year, at the Edwards Park Municipal Golf Course on Sept. 20. Last year's participation set a record for number of teams and number of participants.

"To me, it's a great honor to have the meet named after her become such a good local meet," Wagner said. "We're the biggest school, there are smaller schools, for the most part, but I think that is part of the draw. Just because you're a small school doesn't mean you can't have a teamful of good runners. At meets, sometimes it's the smaller schools you have to watch out for."

"I don't think it's an easy course," Wagner said, "but it seems like we have runners that get a lot of PRs there. We have hills, ups and downs and we finish on a long uphill. It's in a good spot on the schedule, because kids are in the middle of the season and finally getting their footing, getting their stride."

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