

Ryan back in search of third state medal at Central Plains

By MIKE COURSON

Coaches around the state usually cringe when Gary Bittner uses the word "rebuild." His Central Plains and Claflin tennis teams always find a way to win. But this year the word might have meaning. Even with a two-time state medalist back, the 2018 Lady Oilers will be relatively inexperienced.

"This will be a rebuilding year for us," said Bittner, back for a 36th season. "I hope the girls have worked hard over the summer. We hope to improve with each practice and tournament that we participate."

Whether it's the basketball court or the tennis court, junior Emily Ryan has excelled in her first two varsity seasons. She finished fifth at state her freshman year after posting a 32-6 record. She moved to 33-3 as a sophomore, good enough for second at state.

Last year was likely the start of a good rivalry between Ryan and Kansas City Christian's Lilly McNeill, who defeated Ryan 6-2, 6-0 for the state title. Like Ryan, McNeill is just a junior this season. Sense Cadman, a junior at Wichita Independent, finished fourth at state last year.

Mikayla Menges also qualified for state last season. She and No. 1 doubles player Hannah Beran are two of Bittner's biggest losses for 2018. With those gaps, Bittner will be looking for a consistent lineup. "Since we lack experience, we will probably experiment with various lineups," he said.

Junior Zoe Potter was the other half of last year's No. 1 doubles team. She returns after posting a 16-14 record with Beran. Senior Katie Gunder went 4-12 as a No. 2 doubles player last year. Gunder is joined by fellow seniors Kayla Haas and Brianna Hickel. The team will also include junior Shelby Vessey, sophomores Brooke Farmer and Jennah Jeffrey, and freshman Sarah Beran. Joan Klug is again back as an assistant coach.

With an inexperienced team, Bittner puts a premium on each of the competitions heading into regional play. "All of our tournaments are important," he said. "Each player needs to put in the needed work and hit the ball with confidence. They also need to be prepared for the challenges we will face."

The Lady Oilers will host a quad in Claflin on Sept. 18. Central Plains will host a bigger meet in Great Bend on Sept. 27.

Macksville Mustangs look to stay on winning track in 2018

By MIKE GILMORE

Chet Skinner's rebuild of the Macksville gridiron program took a big leap last season adding three wins to its schedule, gaining the playoffs and stuffing the stats books for the fifth-largest improvement in eight-man football.

After finishing 4-5 overall and 1-3 in district play in 2016, last year's 7-3 club qualified as the runner-up out of Eight Man I District 6 that featured four teams finishing 4-5 or better and three with at least six wins. In district play, the Mustangs lost to eventual district champ South Central 23-16, but rallied with 46-point tallies over Kiowa County and Pratt Skyline and beating Attica-Argonia 42-22.

They ended the regular season with an huge 84-32 win over Fairfield, in front of the Macksville fans at home.

That put them up against Central Plains, Central Prairie League king and perennial playoff contender, in a road first-round game. They lost, 56-12, but the Oilers did as well, in the next round 32-

28 to Spearville.

That brings the program back around to a time from 2002-11, when Macksville made the playoffs every year but one, going 13-0 with a state championship in 2007 and a 10-1 season in 2011. Back from the doldrums of the last five years, when the Mustangs went 4-5, 1-8, 0-9, 1-8 and 4-5, when point production was a major concern.

Defense was a big factor last year. Macksville scored 34 points per game and gave up 42.7 in 2016. Last year, the scoreboard favored the Mustangs with 46 points per outing, while giving up 25.1 - ranking sixth among eight-man's best defenses.

It helps to have solid stallions in the stable.

Senior Jacob Rein had 24 of the Mustangs' 57 touchdowns - 13 with 737 yards on 60 carries and 11 in 25 catches for 491 yards. Senior Karson Waters had 22 catches for 276 yards and five TDs.

Junior quarterback Kody Mead had 83 completions in 166 at-

tempts for 1,237 yards and 25 TDs. The offense committed just 10 turnovers all season, making good on one of Skinner's pre-season goals to eliminate mistakes.

This season, though, Skinner will have to find someone else for Mead to throw to, as well as shore up the defense. Macksville's second through fifth leading tacklers have graduated, though Harley Blaske returns as a junior, bringing back 73 stops through nine games.

Macksville returns five offensive starters and five defensive starters for the 2018 season.

"Macksville's keys to success in 2018 will rely on our returning players," Skinner said. "We have a solid core group of guys that have been starters for multiple years now. Our athleticism will look to stretch the field and give defenses trouble and defending both the run and the pass.

"A strong summer weights and conditioning off-season will be vital for the Mustangs to stay as one of the top teams in the district."

St. John begins 2018 season with new grid coach

By MIKE GILMORE

The Tigers will be starting the 2018 season with their third head football coach in three years.

High school mathematics instructor Mike Simpson will be stepping in to fill the void left by head coach Mike Joiner, whose Tiger team went 2-7 in 2017.

Joiner succeeded coach Chris Story, who compiled a 7-30 record from 2013-2016. The Tigers haven't enjoyed a winning football season since 2012, when veteran coach Nick Garcia took



St. John to the playoffs with an 8-2 record. St. John's best postseason run was in 1983 to the quarterfinals. This season, the Tigers are the fifth-smallest school in Eight-Man Division I.

Last year, the Tigers posted 144 points over the season, but most of that was registered in a 56-24 win over Kinsley in week two and in a 30-22 win over Ellinwood. St. John was shut out three times, beginning with a 58-0 rain-soaked loss to Otis-Bison in St. John; 56-0 to Central Plains and 46-0 to Little River in district play. The Tigers' forfeit to Goessel was registered as a 2-0 loss.

This year's district reshuffling won't do much to help, with reigning

district champ Central Plains (9-2) and runner-up Little River (7-3) returning to the late-season slate. Upward-moving Macksville moves to district opponent as well as Moundridge, which moves to eight-man after a 2-7 11-man season and Pratt-Skyline 2-7, which is 3-0 over the Tigers in their last three meetings since 2015.

Cashe McVey returns as the team's top rusher and receiver at quarterback, and anchors the defense from the cornerback position.

Central Plains tennis 2018

Aug. 28	@Ellsworth
Sept. 4	@ Hoisington
Sept. 6	@Smoky Valley
Sept. 8	@Hesston
Sept. 13	@Hesston
Sept. 18	HOME QUAD
Sept. 22	@Wakeeney
Sept. 27	HOME @GB
Oct. 5-6	Regionals
Oct. 12-13	State

Macksville football 2018

Aug. 31	@Kinsley
Sept. 7	NESS CITY
Sept. 14	@Victoria
Sept. 21	ST. JOHN
Sept. 28	@Moundridge
Oct. 5	LITTLE RIVER
Oct. 12	@Pratt Skyline
Oct. 19	CENTRAL PLAINS
Oct. 26	Playoffs TBA

St. John football 2018

Aug. 31	MEDICINE LODGE
Sept. 7	KINSLEY
Sept. 14	@Ness City
Sept. 21	@Macksville
Sept. 28	@Central Plains
Oct. 5	MOUNDRIDGE
Oct. 12	@Little River
Oct. 19	PRATT SKYLINE
Oct. 26	Playoffs TBA

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