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Nuggets Baseball Ready For The 2026 Season

By Beau Lofgren

After a long winter indoors, baseball fans itch as March and April arrive—the start of high school baseball season!

Leading the team is Beau Lofgren (HHS Class of 1999), who returns for his 24th year as head coach of the program. “Nothing makes you feel more youthful than being around kids and activities.”

Lofgren said. “Working with the players is always the best part of the job. A trove of awesome players and teams have come and gone here through the years. This year is no exception.”

The weather this spring has been typical in the unpredictable department. “22 of our first 26 practices were held inside,” said Lofgren. “We had a short balmy stretch getting outside three days in a row. Then, a foot of snow fell, with two more weeks to go.”

The power is in your reaction to any situation. What do you do? You continue to work, do the best with what you’ve got, and move forward. The boys have adjusted as well as possible.”

In 2025, the Nuggets played their way through an 18-game regular season. Hawley finished with a record of 11-7.

“It was a very rewarding season on the field,” Lofgren said. “There were many high-water moments to savor. We did a much better job of getting leads early and staying ahead. Hitting improved, and our pitching kept us in games. Most importantly, team culture and chemistry were rock solid all year.”

In the opening round of the Section 8AA Playoffs, the Nuggets drew Menahga in a loser-out matchup at the Rodeo Grounds. Hawley won a hard-fought 2-1 extra-inning decision over the Braves earlier in the year. The rematch would prove to be another close game.

“When I think of Menahga, I think of baseball,” Lofgren stated.



The Nuggets baseball team members are, left to right, front row-Jayden McCroskey, Jaxon Menke, Anderson Brager, Landon Peterson, Giovanni Grassi, Trebor Halvorson, Cooper Roering, Rylan Nelson, Seth Payette, Daxton Paulson; back row-Jonny Lofgren, Eli Strawsell, Brody Hadley, Wyatt Jegtvg, Dillon Hoekstra, Morgun Kloos, Hayden Martin, Bennett Hamre, Tucker Laaveg, Owen Becker, and Logan Leister.

“They have a rich tradition and play in a tough Park Region Conference. They were also the scariest 4-15 team in the state, losing six games by one run.”

Hawley defeated Menahga 7-4 thanks to a dominating performance on the mound by Tommy Slette and a grand slam off the bat of Wyatt Jegtvg.

“I’ve been fortunate to be a part of many memorable postseason moments as a baseball coach over the years. That win over Menahga ranks right up there. It was fun, intense playoff baseball in our home ballpark.”

The Nuggets advanced to the double-elimination portion of the tournament in Perham, where they took on Perham, ranked #2 in the state. After losing a tight 4-2 contest in their previous matchup, Hawley battled to the end, but fell 5-1.

“Hawley graduated three seniors from last year’s team. Slette, Carter

Ambuehl, and Payton Highness. “It certainly took a while to get used to those three not around here,” said Lofgren. “Tommy was a three-year starter and multi-Heart O’Lakes All-Conference Team member as a catcher and pitcher. Carter took on the role of utility player and owned it from Day #1. He proved to be solid both offensively and defensively. Payton bloomed late in his career to become a serviceable left fielder and bottom-of-the-lineup hitter. All three left it all out on the field and will go on to be great men.”

Flashing ahead to 2026, the Nuggets have twenty-one players on their varsity roster. Seniors Owen Becker and Hayden Martin, along with juniors Brody Hadley, Dillon Hoekstra, Wyatt Jegtvg, & Eli Strawsell serve as team leaders.

“These six guys are the longest tenured varsity players in the program,” noted Lofgren. “Our success will hinge greatly upon their

ability to lead and inspire others.” Other seniors include Logan Leister and Cooper Roering, who both came “out of retirement.”

Other juniors include Giovanni Grassi, a foreign exchange student from Italy, and Jonathan Lofgren, another player who’s back after taking a couple of years off.

“It’s been awesome having these four in our program,” Lofgren shared. “Cooper and Logan have helped boost our outfield depth and are as solid as human beings get. Gio has been a great teammate and helps keep a good vibe at practices with his outstanding playlists. And Jonathan. Well, what can I say? He’s my son. It’s the first year I’ve ever had the chance to coach my own child at the varsity level. It’s been very special for the two of us.”

Sophomores back this year are Anderson Brager, Morgun Kloos, Landon Pederson, and Jayden McCroskey. Rounding out the roster

are freshman Jaxon Menke, Seth Payette, Rylan Nelson, Bennett Hamre, Trebor Halvorson, Tucker Laaveg, and Daxton Paulson.

Around the diamond, some spots are locked, while others will be a feeling-out process.

“We have some new faces this year at the varsity level, so it’s always a challenge to put the pieces together early on,” Lofgren said. “Versatility and depth, along with varsity inexperience, will be early roadblocks, but I’m excited to see where the chips fall. The goals are to put the best team on the field each night while giving guys as much playing time as possible in spots where they will be successful. Our purposes are to improve as a team, represent our school and community well, and most importantly, have fun.”

Becker, Hadley, and Strawsell will anchor the pitching staff. Halvorson, Kloos, and Jegtvg will get looks down the line. Hoekstra, Becker, Hadley, Jegtvg, and Brager are the top returning hitters in the lineup from a season ago. “With a larger roster comes more flexibility. Players will need to earn their time.”

In 2026, we will see strong teams in both the Heart O’Lakes Conference and Section 8AA. Lofgren eyes Perham as the favorite once again.

“The Yellowjackets have won the conference each season since 2018, losing only one conference game in that time,” said Lofgren. Staples-Motley and Breckenridge look to be other teams that could contend for the HOL Crown. “Section 8AA has plenty of solid programs as well. The Section 8AA winner has played in the state championship third-place or consolation title game in the last four seasons. That speaks a ton about our section.”

There are a few changes to the coaching staff this year. Longtime assistant coach Keith Hanson (16

years) retired over the offseason.

“I am so thankful for the years of coaching with Keith,” Lofgren commented. “He knew baseball and how to approach problems when they needed to be addressed/corrected. With his two daughters in track, it’s hard to be “Dad” and coach baseball at the same time. I wish Coach Hanson all the best.” Nick Bircherm (3rd year) slid up from the junior high ranks to be the varsity assistant/JV Coach. “Nick has high expectations of the kids he works with, whether it’s in the classroom or elsewhere,” Lofgren said. “He is level-headed, fair, and passionate about the game and extremely supportive. I’ve enjoyed the start we’ve had coaching together.” At the junior high level, Zach Harazin returns for his second year at the helm, working with the 26 7th-8th graders out for spring ball. Harazin is a Burnsville, MN, native who lives and works in Hawley and is married to Canan Muscatell of Hawley. He was a three-year starting catcher at UW-Lacrosse. “Coach Harazin has had a big impact on our program,” said Lofgren. “He stepped in and got to work right away last spring. He also coached Babe Ruth Baseball last summer, getting his team one game away from a state tournament berth. He’s excited to be back.”

Eric Lee joined the program this year and is also coaching junior high. “Eric is a highly respected member of the Hawley staff,” Lofgren noted. “He coaches junior high football, officiates, and works at many sporting events. He knows the kids and the kids know him.” Rounding out the coaching staff are four volunteer coaches. Todd Sather (DGF Class of 1998) played baseball at NDSU and had a brief stint with the FM Redhawks. A trio of HHS alumni is also in the coaching mix: Alec Hinrichs (HHS Class of 2005), Brady Harms (HHS Class of 2006), and Taylor Harms (HHS Class of 2010). “Todd has been a big part of our youth the past few years,” Lofgren noted. “Alec, Brady, and Taylor were all three sports athletes and impactful players in their time on the diamond here. We did a lot of great things both in high school and legion ball when they played. I’m looking for them to pass along what they learned to our guys while working with individuals to improve skills. I want positive people who treat everyone within the program with respect. We’ve hit the gold mine with these great coaches.”

Lofgren concluded with the following: “As always, the two most important goals for our kids are to control what they can control and to peak at the end of the season. So far, the boys have handled everything in stride. Once games are played, we will look to improve our shortcomings and also take the time to enjoy the journey a season entails. We are all looking forward to another year of baseball with the goal of making a run in late May into June!”

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