

Gulls enter rebuilding year with young team

By Gary Henley
Seaside Signal

The state 4A champions of 2014 and 2015 are in full-on rebuilding mode in 2017.

Seaside boys golf coach Jim Poetsch can proclaim one thing: He has one of the youngest teams in the region.

That fact was evident in the first two tournaments of the new season for the Gulls.

Just two years after winning their second straight state championship, Seaside has youth up and down the roster, with no seniors and just one junior.

Seaside's second outing of the current season was a 43-stroke loss to Cowapa

League rival, on Seaside's home course at Gearhart.

"We got a chance to see where we need to be if we want to compete at season's end this year," Poetsch said after the match. "Valley Catholic returns five players from a team that led the state tournament after the first day last year, and they should have a shot at the title this year."

"We have a bunch of young guys that don't have a lot of experience, but they are getting a little better every day," he said. "Jackson (Kunde) showed some flashes of good golf today, as he birdied two of the last three holes on the front side."

Seaside opened the season by finishing seventh out

of 10 teams at The Dalles Invitational — a tough tournament for a young team to make its debut.

Sophomore Connor Merrell led the Gulls with a 93, followed by another sophomore, Samson Sibony, with a 96. Kunde — Seaside's most-experienced player as the lone junior — shot 100 followed by two more sophomores, Mason Shamion and Mason Crawford.

The Dalles Invite "was a good test for our young guys," Poetsch said. "Besides the home team, only five players were able to break 90. Connor was only a few strokes off joining that elite group. He has worked hard during the off-season, and I expect him to get a little better each week as the

season progresses.

"This course points out any flaws in your game, and it showed us we have some work to do," he said. "But for as young as we are, we only scored a few higher than last year. I'm hoping this group sees their potential to be a good team and works to reach that goal this year."

Scappoose is the defending district regional champion, as the Indians took the team title last season over Crook County, Valley Catholic and Seaside.

All four teams were within 16 strokes of each other.

Kunde was Seaside's second-highest scorer in the regional meet, behind the graduated Aaron Richardson.



GARY HENLEY/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Jackson Kunde is Seaside's most experienced golfer.

Verhulst takes over as head coach for Lady Gulls golf



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Caroline Kotson is back for another season of golf for the Lady Gulls.

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The Seaside girls golf program is under new management, as Mike Verhulst takes over as head coach for the Lady Gulls.

And the good news for Verhulst — the Gulls have a good mix of returners and new golfers. A good turnout is half the battle in 4A girls golf, as Seaside finished the district tournament with just four golfers, the minimum number to qualify in team-scoring.

Of the 12 schools that took part in last year's district championships, only seven had complete teams.

Seaside finished sixth among the scoring teams, and the Gulls have three of their four golfers returning.

Caroline Kotson and Diana Tinoco are seniors, while Mad-

dy Brown is back for her sophomore season.

In addition to the returners, Seaside has four freshmen in the lineup: Xcaret Bello, Tianna Chen, Emma Harvey and Caitlin Hillman.

"Caroline, Diana and Maddy were varsity members last year," Verhulst said. "I'm very excited to have a full squad and a few JV players this year. It is great to see interest building with the younger ladies."

Kotson "looks to be one of the strongest golfers in the league," he said. "I look forward to seeing how the season goes for the girls."

Kotson was Seaside's top golfer in both the Cowapa League meet and the district championships.

The District 1/4A champion in 2016 was Crook County, which went on to a second-place team finish at state.