

Knappa looks to recapture the Northwest League

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

The prospects for the 2015 season looked promising for the Knappa Loggers.

They were coming off a 4-0 league season in 2014, in which they made the Class 2A semifinals and outscored the rest of the Northwest League, 197-6. And the Loggers had the league's best offensive line, with two of the top skill-position athletes in Class 2A.

No one could have predicted that those two players would miss most of the 2015 season with injuries, which derailed the Logger Express before it even left the station.

Knappa finished 1-2 in league play, and missed the state playoffs for the first time since 2006.

The 2016 Knappa Loggers are healthy, loaded with skill-position players, and now they're looking to take back their league.

"I'm excited to see these kids perform," Knappa coach Aaron Barendse said of his team. "We took a lot of lumps last year. We've been real fortunate with skipping the injury bug, but last year was brutal.

"As long as we stay healthy, we'll be fun to watch," he said. "We have a ton of speed and a lot of athletes."

The NWL

Last year, Northwest League football fans saw just how much one or two players on one team can make a difference.

Vernonia added a couple transfers, scored over 56 points in six of its nine regular season games, and won the league title (then promptly gave up 56 points in a first round loss in the state playoffs).

Meanwhile, injuries to a few players at Neah-Kah-Nie forced the Pirates to completely cancel their 2015 season, as they forfeited their last four games.

Knappa was also affected, when starting quarterback Dale Takalo was not cleared to play because of a concussion, and running back Reuben Cruz missed all but the last game.

Unfortunately, neither will be a part of the 2016 Loggers (Cruz had a recent surgery and is out for the season), but that doesn't mean the Loggers won't compete. Knappa is actually in pretty good shape, compared to the rest of the NWL.

Vernonia is "Wared" out, as they lost senior co-Defensive Player of the Year Blade Ware to graduation, and his brother, Offensive Player of the Year Steele Ware, transferred to Rainier, where coach Thor Ware has also returned, to help coach the



Freshman Kanai Phillip could be a factor for the Loggers in his first season.



Knappa football head coach Aaron Barendse talks to his team as the Knappa High School Loggers practice earlier this month. More photos online at DailyAstorian.com

Columbians.

In all, Vernonia lost seven all-league players.

Neah-Kah-Nie, Nestucca and Vernonia all have new coaches as well. Which leaves a lot of question marks around the league.

"I'm curious to see what offenses and defenses they will run," Barendse said. "Gaston has a lot of big boys back, so they'll be physical. But there's a lot of question marks going into the season, as far as who we're playing and what the heck they're running."

Nestucca lost a boatload of all-league seniors, including second-team quarterback Brett Elder; and it's been over 12 years since Neah-Kah-Nie has been able to win more than one league game in a season.

Which leaves ...

The Loggers

Knappa comes back strong with a tough, experienced line, and all kinds of talent at the skill positions.

"We have a lot of wide receivers and running backs," Barendse said. "We're not as deep on the line, but the kids we have are working hard, and I'm

proud of 'em. I think we'll surprise some people."

Among others, Knappa has all-leaguers Jacob Ford and Reece Hunt up front, along with David Patterson and Cody Stuhr. All four are juniors.

Running behind the Fear-some Foursome will be one of the best running backs at the 2A level, senior Andrew Goozee.

"Goozee will be a handful for teams," Barendse said. "He's an all-league running back, all-state linebacker. I think he will be one of the best running backs in the state."

Barendse has a couple options at quarterback, with juniors Mason Hoover and Kaleb Miller, a former Pleasant Hill Billie.

Miller has moved with his family to Knappa, where his dad, Kirk Miller, has joined Barendse's coaching staff after previous coaching stops in Harrisburg, Regis and Pleasant Hill.

"Mason Hoover is doing a heck of a job," Barendse said. "He bailed us out last year, and has a great attitude and work ethic. Kaleb is also a talented quarterback."

On the receiving end of their passes will be seniors



Knappa's Kaleb Miller makes a throw as the Knappa High School football team practices.

LOGGER FOOTBALL

Coach: Aaron Barendse, 5th year

2015: 3-5 (1-2 NWL)

All-League Losses: Michal Goodman, Jared Parks

All-League Returners: Jacob Ford, Jr. (DL), Andrew Goozee, Sr. (RB/LB), Reece Hunt, Jr. (OL/DL)

Mitch Geisler and Ethan Rubus (missed most of last year with a knee injury), and sophomore Tyler Green.

Adding talent on both sides of the ball will be senior Andrew Alder, junior Braedon Eltagonde, sophomores Timber Engblom and Luke Goozee, and freshman Kanai Phillip.

Cruz will have to wait until his senior year to play football.

"I feel horrible for (Cruz), after missing last year except for the final game," Barendse said. "He had a great camp at West-ern Oregon, and he's probably the best all-around athlete in our league. A phenomenal talent. I hope he has a healthy recovery so he can play the other sports he loves."

Also on the coaching staff are John Benthin, Chris Geisler and Chad Harrington.



From left to right, Kourtney Tischer, Alisha Murphy and Jaden Miethe serve up some action for the Knappa volleyball team during a recent practice.

Loggers hope to 'AcuSpike' the competition

By GARY HENLEY
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LOGGER VOLLEYBALL

Coach: Jeff Kaul, 7th year

2015: 6-6 Northwest League

Playoffs: Lost league playoff at Gaston

All-League Loss: Bailey Corder

All-League Returner: Kaitlyn Landwehr, Sr.

The dreaded "League Playoffs" were not kind to the Knappa Lady Loggers last school year.

It all started with volleyball. After sweeping Gaston in the regular season match (25-19, 25-11, 25-20), the No. 5-seed Greyhounds scored a little revenge in the league playoffs, defeating No. 4-seed Knappa in four games, ending the Lady Loggers' season.

And last spring, the Knappa softball team swept three games from Neah-Kah-Nie during the league season, then lost a loser-out game to the Pirates in the league playoffs.

Here's an idea for the league: How about making the regular season count for something?

"My goal is to make it state," Knappa coach Jeff Kaul said. "I told everyone at the awards ceremony last year, 'if these girls make it to some open gyms and work hard in the summer,' I would be taking them to state this year.

"That's our goal, and what happens once we get to state, that just depends on how hard we play."

The NWL

The 2016 Loggers can hopefully avoid league playoff elimination all-together, if they can finish first in league play. Not an impossible task.

Vernonia — always a tough match for Knappa — lost four all-league players to graduation.

"Vernonia graduated just about their whole team," Kaul said. "But they always seem to be able to get good players, they have good size, and they do have some big JV players coming up."

League champion Faith Bible "lost their big hitter (Maile Kam) — I'm thankful she's out of the league," he said. "The team that worries me the most is Gaston. They came alive at the end of the season. They can hit, and they were all sophomores."

The Lady Loggers

If there's one thing the Lady Loggers don't lack, it's



Assistant coach Christina Kaul, left, watches the action as Knappa players Mackenzie Strain and Paris Vanderburg (background) practice.

experience. Knappa had just one senior on the roster last year (Bailey Corder), and the Loggers have six varsity returners.

They're all talented, all experienced ... and they're going to collect a lot of wins over the 2016-17 school year.

We know the names:

Seniors Kaitlyn Landwehr and Alisha Murphy; and juniors Jaden Miethe, Mack Strain, Kaitlyn Truax and Paris Vanderburg.

Landwehr is the setter, Miethe will be a libero, Truax is a middle blocker/outside hitter, and Murphy is an all-around player.

Additions for 2016 will be junior Emma Taggart and sophomores Hannah Hellberg and Kourtney Tischer.

"Out of all the girls," Kaul said, "Paris Vanderburg is the one who is going to be our main hitter. We had her hitting the other day at 8-foot-10 — that's where she is making contact with the ball. And she's hitting hard, so I'm hoping she continues that and stays healthy."

Kaul also gave an endorsement for the "AcuSpike" training machine.

"I bought a new AcuSpike for the team," he said. "It automatically loads and sets, so they can learn their arm swing and when to jump. You can get a lot of reps in, work strictly on form and get that muscle memory going."

"It's already made a dramatic difference in the way the girls are hitting. I'm excited about that part of our game. Teams know we're a good defensive team — we competed with everybody we played, even some of the top teams. But we didn't have any offense. I'm hoping that our offense surprises some people."

The 'Elite Eight' hit the course for Knappa XC

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Eight runners, including six seniors.

That's the make-up of this year's Knappa cross country program, as the Loggers head into a cloudy future.

"Not sure what the future holds," said Knappa coach Stan Sporseen, when referring to Logger cross country. "Three younger runners decided not to turn out for various reasons. But we are focusing on this group."

And this year's crop of runners are a "great bunch of kids with outstanding attitudes," he

said. "They're great students to boot. As always, our goals will be to improve as the season goes on and set many personal records along the way."

Despite competing in a very tough district for cross country, "I would think the boys could be a mid-team finisher at district," Sporseen said.

The Knappa boys finished 10th out of 10 teams in last year's district meet, while the Lady Loggers did not have enough runners to field a complete team.

In 2015, Sporseen said, "the top 15 boys ran under 18 (minutes) at district (four runners were from Catlin Gabel) and

the top 42 ran under 20. On the girls' side 16 of the top 20 finishers at district return."

For the Knappa boys, senior Cody Hobbs is a four-year runner who ran a sub-20-minute in his last race ("Would like to see him break 19 at some point," Sporseen said).

Senior Noah Bagnall is a three-year runner who has the potential to run under 19 minutes, and is looking for an upper half finish in the district finals, after placing 50th out of 83 runners last year.

Senior Noah Gothro is in his fourth year, and "very capable of running in the low 20s," Sporseen said. "Great attitude. Would

consider him one of our leaders."

Junior Spencer Fulton is in his third year of running, but is currently battling a knee injury. He could be a factor by season's end.

Junior Keenan Gebhart is in his second year with the team, and is "Our most improved runner by a long shot last year," said the coach.

The Knappa girls have three runners, led by senior Devin Vandergriff, a three-sport athlete who excels as a sprinter in track.

She placed 38th in last year's district meet.

Seniors Hailey Murray and Chelsea Sapp round out the list for the Lady Loggers.



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