

Young Warriors baseball team hopes to battle back

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

In case you're wondering about Warrenton Baseball, 2017 ... "We'll be young," said coach Lennie Wolfe. "But we try hard not to use that as an excuse for lack of success. We're going to be young, so there will be some things that we just can't do yet. We'll continue to develop. We'll get there."

And just so you know, they'll be young.

THE LEWIS & CLARK LEAGUE

"Rainier returns everything," Wolfe said, or close to everything. "I think they had two seniors who contributed, but they basically return seven or eight starters, and all their pitching."

"I have to believe they will be competing for a state title this year," he said of the Columbians. "It's just going to be tough to win a state title when Stanfield has everyone back (except the head coach)."

Elsewhere, "Clatskanie graduated a lot of guys. They only have one returning starter. Catlin didn't lose very much," although apparently one of Catlin Gabel's best returners, a first-team all-leaguer, has transferred to Central Catholic.

"It's difficult for me to project this year," Wolfe said. "We only have three returners. But the way our league is set up, if you finish in the top four (and there's only five teams), you've got a chance. We just have to develop enough to be competitive at the end of the year."

THE WARRIORS

The Warriors were going to be young to begin with. Add to that, two of their top returning pitchers are no longer with the team, and Warrenton will be rebuilding with youth. Lots of youth.



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Warrenton's Ray Alcobendas takes his turn at bat in Thursday's game vs. Nestucca. He is one of three seniors on the team. Alcobendas ran track last year.

WARRENTON BASEBALL

Coach: Lennie Wolfe, 26th year

2016: 9-14 (3-9 league)

Playoffs: Lost league playoff at Clatskanie, 10-3

All-League Losses: Anthony Cochran, Joe Little, Justice Watson, Hunter Wilson

All-League Returners: None

There's only three seniors, but just one with experience.

Derek Ham is a third-year varsity player who batted .239 and played left field last season.

The other seniors are outfielders Ray Alcobendas and Hayden Bingham, who both ran track last year.

"They decided to try something different their senior year," Wolfe said. "Neither has played since junior high, so that will be a challenge."

The junior class includes Matthew Burgher, in his second year, and first-year player Devyn Grubaugh. Both could see action in the outfield.

The bulk of the Warrenton roster falls in the freshmen and

sophomore classes.

Sophomore Kaleo'o Kupua could start anywhere on the field.

"His best position is the outfield, but we'll need him in the infield at times," Wolfe said. "I'm happy with his development. He had a good summer, and made good strides."

Other sophomores are potential outfielders Paddy McCargish and Maverick Pedraza.

The key freshmen: Gabe Breitmeyer (can play a number of positions, including catcher when fellow freshman Jacob Morrow pitches); Alec Herrera, infielder; Devin Jackson (first base, left-handed pitcher); Austin Little (shortstop and

pitcher); and Morrow (catcher, pitcher, possible infield).

On the plus side, "Just about all the freshmen are three-sport kids," Wolfe said. "I do like the ability levels of the kids we have."

"Every year, I say we could finish first or we could finish fourth. I don't feel that I would say anything different now."

"The team I'm going to put on the field is going to be young, and we're not going to use that as an excuse for failures. We're going out there with the goal of winning and competing just like everyone else."

Pitching-wise, "we know that we'll be using more arms in every game than ever before," he said. "We play three games every week (in league play), and I could have as many as six kids pitching. If I did that in the past, it was because we could, as opposed to the way it is now — we'll need them right from the get-go."



Gary Henley/The Daily Astorian

Warrenton senior Landree Miethe has hitting down to an art form as the Warriors' leadoff batter.

State playoffs in the cards for Warrior softball?

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WARRENTON SOFTBALL

Coach: Staci Miethe, 16th

2016: 9-18 (5-7 league)

Playoffs: Defeated Portland

Adventist (4-2), lost to Clatskanie (5-4) in league playoffs.

All-League Losses: None

All-League Returners: Niqui Blodgett, Sr.; Claire Bussert, So.;

Landree Miethe, Sr.

With three returning all-leaguers and solid numbers on the field — not to mention a 7-0 start — the Warrenton softball program is poised for big things in 2017.

The Lady Warriors were below .500 in the league standings a year ago (5-7) ... but considering that three of those losses were to the eventual state champions, it wasn't all that bad.

Warrenton even managed to win a league playoff (4-2, at Portland Adventist), before eventually falling to Clatskanie.

This year, it could come down to three regular season games (and likely a fourth in the league playoffs) between Rainier and Warrenton.

"We did finish strong last year, and our expectation, our goal, is to finish one or two in league," said Warrenton coach Staci Miethe. "Realistically No. 2 behind Rainier, because they didn't lose anybody, either."

going into the sixth inning, so we had some sparks."

Elsewhere, "Portland Adventist is going to be in it, too. Their pitcher was only a junior last year, and she was solid. And they beat us once."

Warrenton's final three games of the regular season are a single game at Portland Adventist, followed by a doubleheader at Clatskanie.

THE WARRIORS

Miethe summed it up: "We have our full varsity back, and we're still pretty young."

The Warriors will probably have "two, maybe three freshmen on the field," she said.

Key players will be pitcher Niqui Blodgett, a returning junior; senior catcher Landree Miethe; and an infield that includes junior Rachel Dyer at first, sophomore Dani Bue at second, sophomore shortstop Claire Bussert and junior Tyla Little at third.

"Niqui is solid and she will be able to throw a lot of strikes," Miethe said. "We're not going to give up a lot of runs. And my infield is looking really good."

Warrenton had two freshmen — Natalie Duncan and Kenzi Ramsey — who were both on a tear at the plate in the pre-season.

Also in the mix: sophomores Joe Armstrong, Madison Kadera and Jordyn May; and freshman Melia Kapua.

"The key is going to be keeping our young mistakes to a minimum, and hitting," said the coach. "We're pretty quick. We have some fast girls, and we'll try to use that to our advantage as much as possible. Melia Kapua is superquick and Kenz is superathletic."

"Last year the outfield was a bit of a struggle, but I'm feeling pretty good about it this year. All in all, on paper, I think second is where we should be, and if we get second, we get the chance to go to state."

THE LEWIS & CLARK LEAGUE

The Columbians are the defending 3A state champions.

And although Rainier lost league Player of the Year Sarah Probasco to graduation, the Columbians also return six other all-leaguers.

Meanwhile, "Clatskanie lost quite a few seniors last year," Miethe said. "They still have their pitcher and catcher, who were solid. I think we'll be able to compete a lot better than we did last year. We were a half-inning away from going to state," before losing to the Tigers (5-4) in a winner-to-state, loser-out game.

"Our goals are higher than they've been in a lot of years," said Miethe, whose team matched the best-ever start by a Warrior softball team (Miethe's 2003 team was also 7-0). "We feel like if everything goes the way it's looking, we should be able to make a run at the state playoffs."

"We were doing our season goals, and some of the veteran players were saying, 'OK, let's get second in league.' The new players said, 'why second?' Well, welcome to our league."

Although ... "last year we competed with (Rainier) better than we ever have," she said. "One game was only 1-0

Warriors on the right track even in bad weather

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

An impressive list of young throwers — along with some talented hurdlers, jumpers and runners — has the Warrenton track team set in the blocks and ready to go for another season.

The Warrenton boys were fourth in last year's district meet and the Lady Warriors took eighth, and both sides have district placers returning.

"We have a really small team this year, but we have a lot of hard-working students and I've been impressed with how hard they work in pretty ugly weather," said Warrenton coach Hayley Espelund Rogers. "And not very good circumstances, considering what we have going on at the track right now."

Topping the list for the Warrenton girls is senior Taylor Owens, the returning district champion in the 300-meter hurdles, third in the 100-meter hurdles.

The Lady Warriors are also hoping for some promising points in the throws, specifically from sophomore Fernanda Alvarez.

As a freshman, Alvarez took fourth out of 18 throwers in the district shot put event, and has already surpassed her district mark with a toss of 29-feet, 7-and-1/2 inches in a March 23



Gary Henley/The Daily Astorian

Taylor Owens hopes to be clearing more hurdles all the way to the state meet in her senior season.

meet at Ilwaco, Wash.

Alvarez also scored points in the district 400 meters last year.

Adding depth for Warrenton are sophomore Adriana Dejesus (400 to 1,500 meters), and junior Trinity Womack, who took sixth in the shot put at districts and will be strong in the throws this season.

The Warrenton boys were district title contenders last season, finishing behind Catlin Gabel, Clatskanie and Oregon Episcopal.

The Warriors have lost a

few, gained a few, and have several key athletes returning.

While Warrenton lost district shot put champion Eli Petersen to graduation, senior Devon Bowser has already won a district title in the discus, he's the league's top returner in the shot put (placing second behind Petersen in last year's district meet), and he's a legitimate contender in both at the state level.

The jumps are covered with senior Tyler Whitaker, the league's likely favorite in the high jump, long jump and triple

jump, after placing in second at the district meet in all three last year.

Also lost to graduation was district pole vault champion Rodrigo Verrissimo, but a big returner on the track is senior Luke Liljenwall, a contender who will be scoring points in the middle and possibly long distances, after placing fourth in last year's 800 meters at the district meet.

"Tyler Whitaker should be back in for multiple events, and if we can keep him healthy we hope to be taking him to state," Rogers said. "Taylor Owens also is already showing great form in the hurdles — just wanting to get her speed up a bit."

Elsewhere, "(senior) Alan Martinez and Luke Liljenwall are already running better than they were last year at this time," she said. "Devon Bowser has been throwing great even in the miserable weather we've been having. Sierra (Lyons) is already showing to be really strong in the sprinting and jumping department, and Krista (Morrill) came out, she's working really hard, but unfortunately she's struggling with some injuries."

"There are a dozen or so more students I could easily brag on, as they've put in a lot of great effort already this season."

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