

KNAPPA AND JEWELL SPRING SPORTS PREVIEWS 2018

State title goes through Knappa

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

If you're going to end every season at Volcanoes Stadium, you might as well start playing games there in March.

In addition to their regularly scheduled trip to Keizer in June, the Knappa baseball team recently played two preseason games at their home away from home, Volcanoes Stadium, site of the Oregon high school state championship games.

And it's likely that they'll be back June 1.

Knappa capped the 2017 season at Volcanoes Stadium with the most memorable win in school history, rallying from a 9-1 deficit for a 10-9 win over Reedsport in the Class 2A state championship game.

Class 2A baseball will be deep and talented this year, true. But it's no secret that coach Jeff Miller and the Loggers have cornered the market on talent and depth. They will be heavy favorites to make their fourth straight state title appearance, with a roster full of all-stars at every position.

NORTHWEST LEAGUE

"Nestucca is a contender, Neah-Kah-Nie is solid, well-coached, and they've got experienced kids and one of the best pitchers in league with Bryce Bridge," Miller said.

"In no particular order, Neah-Kah-Nie, Nestucca or Knappa — my guess is the league champion will come from one of those three."

Keep in mind that the Loggers are 87-3 in league play over the last five years.



Gary Henley/The Daily Astorian
Reuben Cruz and the Knappa Loggers are the big favorites to hoist another state championship trophy later this season.

Realistically, it would take a miracle for any team to knock Knappa off the top spot.

Statewide, "Oakland returns the most experienced quality," Miller said. "They will be a major contender."

"Down south, there's Monroe and Oakland, and Umpqua Valley, Bandon and Reedsport are all quality teams."

THE LOGGERS

Knappa lost just three to graduation, so "we didn't lose much in quantity, but a lot in quality," Miller said of Michal Goodman, Andrew Goozee and Jason Miller. "All three were main cogs in what we've done."

"Some new guys will get a shot, and we certainly return some quality players," he said. "There's no doubt some of the top players in the state will be on our team."

That much is true. The Loggers are two or three deep at every position. Their backups would make a good all-league team.

KNAPPA BASEBALL

Coach: Jeff Miller, 17th year
2017: 20-3 (11-1 NWL)
Playoffs: State champions
All-league losses: Mike Goodman, Andrew Goozee, Jason Miller
All-league returners: Reuben Acosta-Cruz, Sr., Logan Bartlett, Jr., Mason Hoover, Sr., Kaleb Miller, Sr., Dale Takalo, Sr., Eli Takalo, So., Colton Weirup, Sr.

Behind the plate, Miller said "I don't think there will be a better catcher anywhere than what we have," in senior Kaleb Miller. "And if we go to our No. 2 catcher, I don't think anybody has that quality either."

"Reuben Cruz will be our No. 2 catcher, so we are stout at the catching position. They can control a game from behind the plate."

On the mound, "we have the Takalo boys (Dale and Eli), Mason Hoover got us through some big games last year, and Reuben will finally get to throw for us this year," Miller said. "And Kaleb Miller will get some time on the mound."

"We have those five, and beyond that, Colton Weirup has been training for four years as a pitcher. We train a lot more guys than you see on the roster."

When Cruz catches, Weirup will play center field.

In the infield, "Ryker Coffey and freshman Cameron Miethe are battling for time at second and third," coach Miller said. "Shawn Lackey can play third base, shortstop or second base. Defensively we'll be solid."

Elsewhere, Logan Bartlett has spent two years at designated hitter, and may see action at third this season, sharing time with Miethe.

"Mason Hoover will hold down shortstop, except when he's on

the mound. Then Dale Takalo will play there, and Reuben and Shaun Lackey are certainly capable.

"Eli moves to first base," Miller said. "He will see a bigger pitching role this year. We moved him along slowly last year, but he pitched in a couple playoff games, and got the win in the state championship. Stuff-wise, he's one of the better throwers at the 2A level."

"He's young, but he has a lively arm. When he's throwing consistent strikes, he's pretty intimidating."

In fact, Eli "may be our hardest thrower, as far velocity, and he has a good breaking ball. He potentially will be a top tier pitcher in 2A baseball."

Still, "Dale is our No. 1 pitcher," Miller said. "He's pitched in the last two state championship games (and played in the last three), and he's very consistent and understands how to pitch."

Other seniors are Jacob Ford, Reece Hunt, David Patterson and Cody Stuhr, "great guys in the clubhouse and at practice," Miller said. "We have nine seniors, the most we've ever had. It's a remarkable group. With nine seniors, you only have so many uniforms to go around."

Logan Flues (Jr.) is the only left-hander in the program. Jaxson Goodman (So.) is another future all-leaguer, as is Devin Hoover (Fr.).

The bottom line is that nine Knappa seniors want to go out on top.

"They've had a lot of success," Miller said. "They understand nothing is guaranteed. It should be a fun journey."

Prediction: They were good two years and great last year, but these Loggers are legendary. State champions.

Knappa back in hunt for league

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

The up and down world of Knappa softball continued last season. Hot starts in league play, followed by cold finishes.

In 2016, Knappa was 10-2 in league at one point, then lost their last three league games and a league playoff to Neah-Kah-Nie, and finished out of the state playoffs.

Last year, the Lady Loggers won their first six league games, by scores such as 14-6, 24-10, 16-4, 14-0 and 21-3.

Knappa lost its final six games, went 1-1 in the league playoffs, and for the second year in a row missed out on state, even with seven all-leaguers on the field.

The Loggers are hoping to reverse that trend in 2018. Three years after they went 12-0 in league, a roster full of young, talented players will once again have Knappa contending for a league title.

NORTHWEST LEAGUE

"It's about the same as it was in basketball," Knappa coach James Nichols said of NWL softball. "Gaston has everybody back except one, and Vernonia lost some starters (including five all-league players), but they still have Joyce Everett and Jordan Walters."

Meanwhile, with loads of talent in the freshmen and sophomore classes (and even more at the eighth grade level), the next few years of NWL softball could belong to Knappa.

THE LADY LOGGERS

Four of Knappa's seven all-league players return in 2018, including last year's Northwest League Player of the Year, Kaitlyn Truax.

While most of last year's team returns, Alisha Murphy and Hailey Murray have graduated, and senior Paris Vanderburg is competing in track, Nichols said.

Truax has spent most of her time behind the plate, but now the senior may see some action in the circle in her final year.

"I've never had a backup catcher since we've had K.K. (Truax)," Nichols said. "But Victoria Ramvick (Fr.) isn't a bad catcher, so we've been throwing K.K. every time we're working the pitchers. Kaitlyn will pitch some this year, because we have another catcher now."

Also returning are sophomores Aiko Miller and Emily Nicholson, who were hurt most of last season.

Sophomore Madelynn Weaver is the No. 1 pitcher, with Nicholson behind her.

Around the infield are Hannah Hellberg (Jr.) at first, Miller at second, Jaden Miethe (Sr.) at shortstop and Laciee Hendrickson (Jr.) at third.

From left to right, the outfield includes Katie Patterson (Jr.), Sophia Carlson (So.) and Nicholson.

Mikayla Rethati (Sr.) will serve as a designated hitter, and Bayle McCall (So.) may see action at second.

The incoming talent includes four freshmen who will all see action.

Ramvick may split time with Nicholson in right field, when Nicholson pitches. Freshmen Raven Corcoran, Cassidy Engblom and Gabi Morrell also join the varsity. Lily Roberts (Jr.) and Katie Denny (out until May 1) round out the roster. Nichols will be assisted by Andrea Weaver, who replaces Jeff Kaul. "I appreciate every second he's coached," Nichols said of Kaul. "For five years he helped out."

Piña-Morton leads Knappa track

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

A sizable turnout on the boys' side will make the Knappa Loggers competitive at the district level this year, while the Lady Loggers will be searching for new points from a select few athletes.

Amanda Isom is the Knappa coach who has the tough task of replacing a couple of key athletes on the girls' side.

Meanwhile, the Knappa boys are finally entering a season with some experience (five seniors), and a potential league champion in sophomore Robert Piña-Morton.

Piña-Morton won the district title in cross country and was the first Logger to qualify for the state cross country meet since 2007, after scoring big points in the district track meet the previous spring. He took second behind Vernonia junior Nathan Colot in the district 3,000 meters, and fourth in the 1,500 meters.

After his breakthrough cross country season, Piña-Morton should challenge for district titles in both distance events on the track this spring.

Both Knappa teams finished seventh in the point standings at last year's district meet.

THE LOGGERS

Girls

Ashley Feldscher
Megan Hellberg, Fr.
Ressa Inman, Sr.
Mikayla Morton, Sr.
Paris Vanderburg, Sr.
Alyssa White, Sr.

Boys

Levi Christie, Sr.
Braedon Eltagonde, Sr.
Josh Fulton, Jr.
Spencer Fulton, Sr.

Keenan Gebhart, Sr.
Josh Jones, Jr.
Pavlo Miller, Fr.
Kanai Phillip, So.
Robert Piña-Morton, So.
Cristian Rodriguez, So.
Nicholas Schaeilling, Sr.
Kayden Stuhr, So.
Spencer Teague, So.

The Lady Loggers scored most of their points between Chelsea Sapp (district triple jump champion, sixth in the long jump) and Devin Vandergriff (second in the 400 and 800 meter finals).

Both have graduated, leaving senior Ressa Inman as Knappa's only returning point-scorer. Inman was fourth in the shot put last season.

A new addition, however, could change Knappa's fortune. Senior Paris Vanderburg has jumped from softball to track, where the versatile athlete will be a welcome addition.

Rounding out the girls' roster will be Ashley Feldscher, Megan Hellberg, Mikayla Morton and Alyssa White.

Jewell Blue Jays ready to compete

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

Strong team showings in last year's district meet will hopefully carry over to the 2018 season for the Jewell track team.

The Blue Jays placed fifth out of 12 teams on the girls' side of the Casco/Valley League, and sixth out of 13 in the boys' standings.

The private schools took most of the top places in the team standings, but Jewell athletes performed well, with two district champions and several top four placers.

Senior Gabi Morales returns as the defending district champion in the 300-meter hurdles, in which she placed fourth at state. She was also second in the district 100-meter hurdles.

Also for the Jewell girls, the entire 400-meter relay team returns, as the foursome of sophomore Aspen Searls, juniors Nereida Morales and Lillian Kaczenski, and Gabi Morales looks to improve on last year's third-place finish in the district meet.

Searls will be competitive in the sprints, while Jewell has talent returning in the throws, with Kaczenski.

The top returner for the boys is senior Ben Stahly, who was third in the district 100, fourth in the 200 and third in the pole vault.

Senior Thomas Meehan was fourth in the district 1,500 and 3,000-meter races.

Go Loggers!

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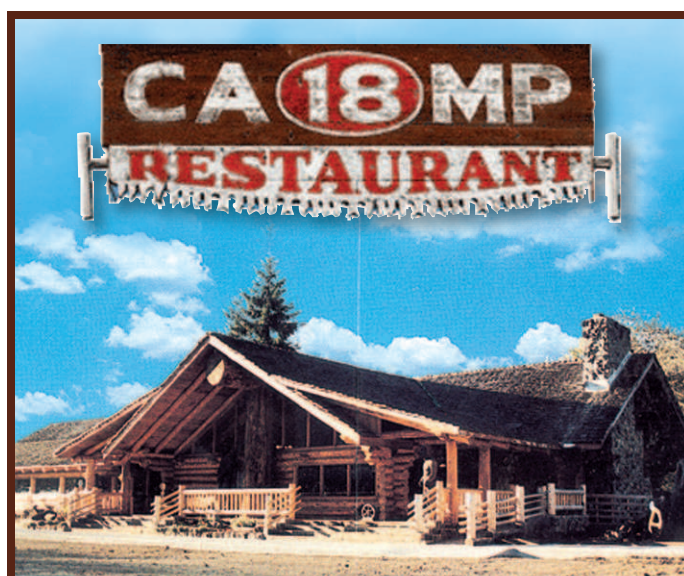
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