

Pioneers reload for another run at state

MAC-HI SOFTBALL

COACH: Nicole Christian, 8th year
2015 SEASON: 28-1, 12-0 GOL (1st)

POSTSEASON STORY: The Pioneers finished the season on a 21-game winning streak to win their second straight state title. They outscored their four playoff opponents 42-0 and beat Banks 4-0 in the championship.

LOSSES: P Colette Robert, 1B Makayla Kelly, SS Stefanie Copeland

KEY RETURNERS: INF Shannon Carter, sr.; INF Micha Fortune, jr.; OF Jenny Field, sr.; OF/INF Brooke Kralman, sr.; P/C Mallory Copeland, jr.; DH/INF Abi Biggs, sr.

By **MATT ENTRUP**
East Oregonian



In the March 31, 2015 file photo, Mac-Hi's Micha Fortune sprints for first base after bunting against Scappoose during a softball game in Milton-Freewater.

It's no secret that the Pioneers have a huge hole to fill this season with the graduation of pitcher Colette Robert, who was named the state's Player of the Year at the Oregon Sports Awards as well as Pitcher of the Year in Class 4A after guiding the team to its second-straight state championships last season.

Coach Nicole Christian is hoping that fact will lead some teams to underestimate the potent mix of talent returning to the team this year.

"I think a lot of people think they're going to walk all over us

this year," she said. "I hope they do overlook us."

The Pioneers return six players that made all-state teams last season, and Christian said she likes their chances to make another deep playoff run, perhaps even win a third state title.

"That's the thing, we know everybody is gunning for us," she said. "Everybody thinks they can get us now that Colette is gone, but I don't think we're by any means out of the loop of getting back again."

Robert's production on the

rubber and at the plate isn't something the team can replace with one player, but with strong defense, the quickest roster Christian has coached in her eight seasons, and plenty of capable hitters, the Pioneers believe they can find plenty of ways to keep the wins coming at a rapid pace.

Junior Mallory Copeland, an all-state catcher last season, will step out in the field and toe the rubber this season.

"Her passion is behind the plate but she also knows that she

wants to do her best for the team wherever we put her," Christian said. "She's been working really hard in the offseason on the mound and she's been working in the cages and getting better."

"She's ready to go. She's just gotten better since the last time I saw her."

The team had several younger players that are vying for innings in the circle as well, and all of them will be backed by a defense Christian expects to be one of the team's biggest strengths once she

figures who will play where.

"We've got a lot of things that we have options of trying, which I love because these kids are so versatile," she said. "Defensively we match up well and it's going to be whoever can hit the ball well the stays in the lineup."

"I have so many options and it's going to be tough to figure out what's going to work for us, and who's going to rise to the pressure. I don't think we're too far off talent-wise knowing that we came get back (to state)."

2016 SCHEDULE

March 17	vs. Weston-McEwen	4:30 p.m.
March 21	vs. Sister (at Bend)	11:30 a.m.
March 21	vs. Scappoose (at Bend)	4:30 p.m.
March 22	vs. Crook County (at Bend)	11:30 a.m.
March 22	vs. Madras (at Bend)	4:30 p.m.
March 25	vs. Stayton	6:30 p.m.
March 26	vs. Twin Falls	9:45 a.m.
March 26	vs. Estacada	3 p.m.
April 2	vs. Yamhill-Carlton	Noon
April 2	vs. Banks	2:30 p.m.
April 5	at The Dalles	4:30 p.m.
April 9	vs. Ontario (DH)*	Noon/2 p.m.
April 12	at Pendleton	4:30 p.m.
April 15	at La Grande (DH)*	2/4 p.m.
April 19	vs. Walla Walla	5 p.m.
April 23	at Baker (DH)*	Noon/2 p.m.
April 30	at Ontario (DH)*	2/4 p.m.
May 2	at Pilot Rock	4 p.m.
May 9	vs. La Grande (DH)*	2/4 p.m.
May 13	vs. Baker (DH)*	2/4 p.m.

*League game

MAC-HI BASEBALL

COACH: Mark Michaud, 1st year
2015 SEASON: 5-20, 0-12

GOL (4th)

POSTSEASON STORY: The Pioneers last played a postseason game in 2012.

LOSSES: INF Joey Barnhart, INF Kody Banek, OF Jacob Dougherty, OF Sterling Sandberg, INF Scott Zitterkopf, INF Jacob Chaney

KEY RETURNERS: P/SS/CF Hunter Yensen, sr.; P/INF Jesus Vela, soph.; INF/P Miguel Garcia, jr.; INF/P Bailey DeBord, sr.; C/1B Keaton Smith, jr.; P/INF Justin Carlson, soph.;

The goals for the Pioneers in Coach Michaud's first season aren't related to wins and losses. The former volunteer assistant said he wants the team to focus on fundamentals, playing better each day and being great teammates.

Michaud expects pitching to be one of the team's strengths, and said senior Hunter Yensen may be the best hurler in the Greater Oregon League. Behind him, sophomore Jesus Vela and junior Miguel Garcia had productive summers and should give the team a solid starting rotation, which will

be necessary with six doubleheaders on the schedule.

The rest of the lineup is little more murky, but Michaud said he likes the talent he's got and it's just a matter of putting everybody in the position they'll best serve the team.

"I'm excited to get this year going," he said. "I'm excited for this opportunity and excited to see the kids grow."

2016 SCHEDULE

March 15	vs. College Place	4 p.m.
March 17	at Weston-McEwen	4:30 p.m.
March 25	vs. Orofino	2 p.m.
April 5	at Elgin	4 p.m.
April 9	vs. Ontario (DH)*	Noon/2 p.m.
April 13	at DeSales, Wash.	6 p.m.
April 15	at La Grande (DH)*	2/4 p.m.
April 18	vs. College Place	4 p.m.
April 23	at Baker (DH)*	Noon/2 p.m.
April 26	at Pilot Rock	4:30 p.m.
April 27	at Irrigon	4 p.m.
April 28	vs. Pilot Rock	4:30 p.m.
April 30	at Ontario (DH)*	Noon/2 p.m.
May 3	vs. Riverside	4:30 p.m.
May 4	at Joseph	TBD
May 9	vs. La Grande (DH)*	2/4 p.m.
May 11	at Riverside	4:30 p.m.
May 13	vs. Baker (DH)*	3/5 p.m.

MAC-HI TRACK & FIELD

COACH: John Milleson, 1st year
2015 SEASON: The

Pioneers boys and girls each finished fourth at the GOL district meet.

POSTSEASON STORY: Three boys and six girls qualified for the state meet in 11 events. Kristi Childers won a gold medal in the 300-meter hurdles and Austin Cousineau won bronze in the 800 meters.

KEY LOSSES: (Boys) Austin Cousineau (middle distance), Gabe McAlester (sprints); (Girls) Kristi Childers (hurdles), Susana Romero-Diaz (relay), Anna Lonai (relay)

KEY RETURNERS: (Boys) Landon Warne, jr. (throws); (Girls) Kitanya Crisman, sr. (relay), Alicia Walter, sr. (throws, pole vault), Amber Wells, sr. (throws), Brianna Hernandez, soph. (middle distance)

In a prearranged move, Coach Milleson steps back into the head role while last season's head coach Stacie Lieuallen will be helping with jumpers and hurdlers while she focuses on family life.

Milleson expects his throwers to be a primary strength for both teams, and hopes an influx of quick athletes can help make the girls into a well-rounded squad.

"We're hoping those young kids learn fast because we've got some good ones out here, and they're going to be making our returners earn their keep for sure," he said. "Sophomores and juniors, they just came out of the woodwork this year."

The boys' team has even more learning curves to navigate, though.

"The boys' side is pretty wide open," Milleson said. "We've lost a lot of guys to graduation the last couple years so we're hurting."

2016 SCHEDULE

March 17	at Pendleton	Noon
April 1	Mac-Hi Carnival of Speed	11 a.m.
April 8	at Umatilla	Noon
April 15	at Hood River	4 p.m.
April 23	at Union	11 a.m.
April 27	at Hermiston	TBD
April 30	at Ontario	11 a.m.
May 6	at Baker City	1 p.m.
May 14	at Districts (Ontario)	TBD

MAC-HI TENNIS

COACH: Michelle Snyder, 12th year

2015 SEASON: The boys placed second at the district tournament and the girls were sixth. Both teams won their sub-district tournament.

POSTSEASON STORY: Carlos Angel was the only Pioneer to advance to the state bracket and went 1-1 there.

LOSSES: (Boys) Alex Alvaraz, Ulysses Zaragoza, Carlos Angel. (Girls) Anniek Kevietsbosch, Sam Tveidt

KEY RETURNERS: (Boys) Rigo Ponce, sr.; Deazen Zerba, soph.; Francisco Robledo, soph.; Jose Abrego, sr. (Girls) Elise Griffith, sr.; Maria Castillo, sr.; Jacky Reyes, sr.; Anna Rodriguez, sr.; Emily Cuellar, jr.

The Pioneers are reloading with the intent of repeating as district champions this season and Coach Snyder is

hoping for big things from her girls singles.

Senior Elise Griffith leads a veteran group as the No. 1 singles player, and all of the girls have been in the program since they were freshmen. Senior Anna Rodriguez and junior Emily Cuellar are slated to be the No. 1 doubles team.

Snyder is optimistic for the boys' team as well, but more youth makes their prospects a little more uncertain. However, senior Rigo Ponce is another four-year player the Snyder is hoping can fare well at No. 1 singles. Senior Jose Abrego and sophomore Francisco Robledo will pair at No. 1 doubles.

"I have a great group of kids and I love working with everyone, and I'm looking forward to a great season," Snyder said.

2016 SCHEDULE

March 15	at College Place, Wash.	4 p.m.
March 29	(B) vs. The Dalles	4 p.m.
March 29	(G) at The Dalles	4 p.m.
March 30	at Riverside	3:30 p.m.
April 1	(B) vs. Pendleton	4 p.m.
April 1	(G) at Pendleton	4 p.m.
April 2	vs. La Grande	11 a.m.
April 4	vs. Umatilla	3 p.m.
April 5	vs. W-M/Helix	4 p.m.
April 7	at Weston-McEwen	4 p.m.
April 8	vs. Ione	3 p.m.
April 11	at Umatilla	4 p.m.
April 12	at Stanfield	4 p.m.
April 14	vs. College Place	4 p.m.
April 18	(B) at Pendleton	4 p.m.
April 18	(G) vs. Pendleton	4 p.m.
April 19	vs. Helix/W-M	4 p.m.
April 21	at La Grande	3 p.m.
April 22	(B) vs. Sandy	TBD
April 23	vs. Mac-Hi Tournament	TBD
April 30	at Helix Tournament	9 a.m.
May 7-9	at Sub-Districts (Kennewick)	TBD
May 13-14	at Districts (Ontario)	11 a.m.

STANFIELD BASEBALL

Coach: Bryan Johnson, 8th year
2015 SEASON: 20-8, 9-1 EOL (1st)
POSTSEASON STORY: Lost 9-6 at Cascade Christian in the state quarterfinals.

LOSS: U Steven Allen
RETURNERS: INF Dylan Grogan, jr.; INF Tony Flores, jr.; OF Thyler Monkus, jr.; OF Jason Fitzpatrick, sr.; INF Ryan Bailey, jr.; INF Hunter Barnes, jr.; OF Justin Keeney, soph.; OF Makiah Blankenship, soph.; Shane Keltz, soph.; Keith Wampler, sr.; Damien Curiel, soph.

With lots of returners, the Stanfield Tigers appear to be in good position, once again, to win the 3A Eastern Oregon League. Stalwarts Dylan Grogan, Ryan Bailey, Tony Flores and Thyler Monkus all return, though Stanfield could be without the versatile Klay Jenson, who suffered a gruesome hip injury in the fall and is still yet to return.

Johnson is hopeful Jenson can return at some point this season, but it seems like a longshot. Hunter Barnes might not play, either.

"They all filled goals out the other day and they think we're capable of competing for a stat title. But it's tough at 3A. Once you get to the final eight, there are some really

good teams, got some private schools. It's tough."

"The good news is we have some depth. We only graduated one guy out of 14, so we have 13 guys coming back. That helps."

2016 SCHEDULE

Mar. 17	vs. Union	4 p.m.
Mar. 19	vs. DeSales (WA)(DH)	11 a.m.
Mar. 22	at Riverside Tourney	10 a.m.
Mar. 23	at Riverside Tourney	TBD
Mar. 29	vs. Kennedy at The Dalles	4:30 p.m.
April 1	vs. Umatilla (DH)*	1 p.m.
April 5	at Riverside (DH)*	1 p.m.
April 8	vs. Burns (DH)*	2 p.m.
April 12	at Tri-City Prep (WA)	5 p.m.
April 15	vs. Imbler (DH)*	1 p.m.
April 19	vs. Pilot Rock	5 p.m.
April 21	vs. Santian Christian	4:30 p.m.
April 23	at Taft	10 a.m.
April 23	vs. Monroe at Taft	noon
April 29	vs. Vale (DH)*	1 p.m.
May 6	at Nyssa (DH)*	1 p.m.
May 13	at Enterprise (DH)*	1 p.m.

*League game

MAC-HI GOLF

COACH: Barry Wofford, 5th year

2015 SEASON: The Pioneers boys placed third at the district tournament led by individual champion Riley Chester.

POSTSEASON STORY: Chester was the only Pioneer to make the state finals and finished 27th in a field of 57 golfers.

KEY RETURNERS: Riley Chester, jr., Evan Kain, jr., Noah Wilson, soph., Armando Garcia, sr.

The Pioneers didn't lose any players to graduation and were just eight strokes from qualifying for the state tournament as a team last season.

"Our goal, we talked about it a lot, we want to make the state as a team," Coach Wofford said. "You have to be top two in the district and we want to do that badly."

Behind the four varsity returners, the Pioneers have a lot of youth that Wofford is hoping means good things for the future of the program.

"One thing I am excited about, out of our 12 guys eight are freshmen or sophomores, so I have time to work with them and hopefully they'll have fun and stick with it," he said.

2016 SCHEDULE

March 17	at M-F Municipal GC	2:30 p.m.
March 23	at Wine Valley GC	2:30 p.m.
March 29	at Veterans Memorial GC	2:30 p.m.
March 31	at Walla Walla CC	2:30 p.m.
April 1	at M-F Municipal GC	Noon
April 4	at Wildhorse GC	TBD
April 12	(G) at La Grande CC	1 p.m.
April 14	(B) at Pendleton CC	Noon
April 15	(B) at La Grande CC	1 p.m.
April 18	(G) at Quail Ridge GC	Noon
April 21	at Big River GC	9 a.m.
April 25	(B) at Quail Ridge GC	1 p.m.
April 27	at Wine Valley GC	12:30 p.m.
May 4	at Veterans Memorial GC	2 p.m.
May 9-10	at Districts	TBD

WAY TO GO MACH!

Go Pioneers!

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