

Viks from 1B

I was a rookie coach — at least here at Siuslaw. We struggled back then. I think we won three or four games that first year because we were really young and didn't have a whole lot of talent. Our freshmen were kind of thrust into things. But they've been able to see it through.”

Returning as seniors this year are Elijah Blanken-

ship, Dalton Stinger and Clay Kramer. All three seniors pitch in addition to playing other positions on the field.

“Elijah has caught in the past,” said Shinn. “He's played middle infield for me in the past. He has played some outfield; he's a kid who can do everything.”

Stinger pitches and plays corner infield, more often than not third base. Kramer is a pitcher and outfield-

er. All three were freshmen varsity players when Shinn took over the program.

While the return of these seniors will help drive the program forward this season, the timing logistics of the season that have been affected by the pandemic will make it a rough start.

“Here's the difficult thing,” explained Shinn, “I have 23 Kids signed up, of which I've seen a maximum of 12 in practice because we still have a lot of the kids



NED HICKSON/SIUSLAW NEWS

Siuslaw coach Tom Shinn, now in his fourth year with the Vikings baseball team, throws practice pitches last week in preparation for this week's league games.

playing football. So, a good portion of what would be considered my varsity kids, I haven't even seen in practice. I'll get one practice day with the kids that are doing football prior to our first game on the 13th.”

One day of practice together as a team following two years between competitions — and a full year since the last practices were held — is surely a challenge. However, Shinn is aware that this same disadvantage is being suffered by all of the teams in the league.

“I keep getting reassured by others that everybody's going through that,” said Shinn, “but it doesn't make it any easier to try and figure out exactly who your varsity players are and where they're going to play. Everything that we would like to get installed and get going, we just really haven't had the opportunity to do.”

In addition to missing half of the team to playing football, the overlap has been difficult for Shinn as a coach, because he is one of the football team's assistant coaches as well.

“It's been a bit of a struggle there,” admitted Shinn. “I haven't been able to be [at football practice] for the last two weeks. During spring break, I was running pitchers' and catchers' practices before going

to football, so I could get some of those kids stronger.”

“We've had to be a little creative with trying to get kids involved so far.”

Like all coaches this season, Shinn wishes that he had more time to prepare.

“This year, I'm going to have 11 kids that will have touched a bat for the first time, possibly in over a year, coming to our first team practice — with our first game the following day,” said Shinn.

Last year, Siuslaw didn't field a JV team. This year, Shinn plans on having two teams due to the number of players who have turned out. But it's a two-edged sword with not having time to develop them. Still, Shinn is optimistic.

“You've got to kind of approach it as everybody's in the same boat. And when you throw your varsity kids out there, we're going to just go get them,” he said. “My personal goal is to win ballgames and be competitive in our league. I think our program is starting to grow and I really thought last year was going to push us towards that. Now it's this year's turn to go get that.”

Earlier this week, following that first day of a full team practice on Monday, Shinn's efforts were rewarded Tuesday (April 13) when Siuslaw went on to

defeat the Cottage Grove Lions in their first game of the season, 11-9.

“It was a little sloppy, we found some things we need to work on,” said Shinn.

During the game, the Vikings tried out three pitching combinations, all to sophomore catcher Ian Sissel.

“Pitching-wise, I liked what I saw for the most part,” said Shinn. “The plan was to limit the number of pitches guys threw so we have arms available for Friday (April 16). Both Elijah and Clay are able to return if we need them.”

Kramer was followed on the mound by junior Jason Garcia, who came in to pitch in the second inning, with Blankenship taking the mound in the sixth inning to close out the game. Blankenship also had 2 runs and an RBI, as well as 2 stolen bases.

In addition to Blankenship, junior Beau Erickson had 2 runs and 3 RBIs, as well as a triple. Junior Isaac Garza also had 1 run and 1 RBI for the Viks.

According to Shinn, whose team is already off to a good start in a season that began with great uncertainty, “Our goal this week will be to limit the errors and strike outs and just keep improving from there.”

the spotlight

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Little from 1B

in oxygen and an increase of carbon dioxide inside their masks.

These tests make the results of the Siuslaw High Schools' boys and girls cross country Sky-Em League Championships even more special. Coach Chris Johnson not only convinced enough runners to be a part of the team, he had to encourage them to run even with their masks fastened to their faces.

All Siuslaw and Mapleton athletes deserve extra support for the increased demands the masked placed on their performances. It might have been easier just to wait it out until masks would no longer be required.

It might have been the reason the Sky-Em cross country meet had fewer complete teams than ever. It does not diminish the accomplishments of the Siuslaw teams' success — in fact, I think it shows more competitiveness than any of the incomplete

teams.

The OSAA established guidelines for athletic contests to take place this spring. These guidelines must be consistent and applied by all Oregon high schools. I called my daughter, Miranda, who is an assistant volleyball and head softball coach at St. Helens High School, to ask her about their mask-wearing teams. She said St. Helens and every team they played wore masks. In addition, she noted the need for her school to take two buses to each away contest to maintain social distancing.

My daughter, Alaura, told of an Oregon volleyball team traveling to a tournament in Texas. The Oregon team played the tournament wearing their masks. Every team they played were not wearing masks because the state of Texas did not require masks.

I decided to watch some ESPN this weekend. I watched some MLB, parts of the men's and women's NCAA tournament, axe throwing and Oregon

track. The inconsistency of mask enforcement was evident and confusing.

Most players were not wearing masks in each sport while officials and non-playing players were wearing masks. Some of the limited spectators were wearing masks but most were not. The requirements of wearing masks are inconsistent or people are choosing to ignore them — the real penalty, of which, just might be the sickness or death of another person.

Siuslaw and Mapleton High Schools are applying safety measures until it is once again safe to be without a mask. I respect their decision to protect their athletes, spectators and our community.

If our athletes can put forth the extra effort needed to train while wearing a mask, it should be within our normal everyday activities to wear our masks as well.

GO VIKINGS and SAILORS!