



Section B

South Lane County Sports and Recreation

SPORTS

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Big shoes to fill for Lions' baseball

With last year's seniors gone, can Cottage Grove snag another Sky-Em title with the help of Coach Geiszler?

By Sam Wright
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Lions baseball returns this spring on Friday, March 17, and Cottage Grove will look to put on another historic season like it did in 2016. With the departure of a lot of strong and impactful seniors, Cottage Grove will have to step up if the team hopes to take home another league title.

Big names like Payton Presley, Hunter Harris, Bryce Allen, Lucas Ward and Ryan East will no longer be on the roster, leaving it up to the younger, but now more veteran players, to lead the way.

But before we jump into the upcoming season, it's important to look back on last season to see what the Lions will miss this year and also what they will retain.

Last year, Cottage Grove swept the special awards in the All-League roster, meaning that the Lions took home the Sky-Em Coach of the Year, Pitcher of the Year and Player of the Year awards.

Head Coach Dan Geiszler was the 2016 Sky-Em Coach of the Year, an honor which, more often than not, comes with a league title. But that is not to dismiss or devalue the impact of Geiszler. The head coach instilled an aggressive mindset in which stealing bases became a



The Lions' baseball team gathers around home plate to congratulate Payton Presley on his second home run of the year. Cottage Grove will be without Presley this year, and the team will look for the next impactful player on the roster.

top priority once runners were on base. Cottage Grove led the league with 108 stolen bases in just 28 games over the course of the season. That's more than double the national average for high school baseball teams.

"It's something we really focus on and we'll take any opportunity given to us," Geiszler said last year.

But it wasn't just base running that gave Cottage Grove its numerous runs each game. First

and foremost, you have to get on base. The Lions held an overall batting average of .286, on par with the national average. However, stars on the team such as Presley consistently boosted the team.

Presley finished his last season at Cottage Grove with a .500 batting average (getting 48 hits on 96 at-bats). This included two homeruns, 12 doubles and 27 RBIs.

Harris batted a .366 average,

and Ward had a .329, both players had 25 RBIs each.

But now that the players with the strongest batting performances are no longer eligible, there will need to be someone else to fill those shoes. That someone could potentially be current senior Brett Ollivant.

Ollivant finished his junior year with a batting average of .308, the highest average after

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Track returns after last year's historic title-winning season



Hanna Albrecht qualified for state in four different races last season. The senior will now look to out-perform herself this year.

The girls' strongest runners have returned, but can the boys take another Sky-Em title without the record-setting seniors that graduated?

By Sam Wright
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Around 80 athletes are on the roster for Cottage Grove's track and field team, an accomplishment that Head Coach Ricky Knutson calls "a great start." These 80 athletes find themselves in one of the greatest eras for CGHS track and field, and last year's record-setting season has placed a tall order for the team.

The boys are coming off of the best team finish since 1977. The 2016 boys track and field team took first place in the Sky-Em League and finished in fifth place in the state meet at Hayward Field.

Cottage Grove will be missing several strong contributors

that were seniors last year. At the district meet, then-senior Connor Howard broke records and put on the story of the season by taking gold in the 100, 200 and 400-meter sprints, not to mention a silver medal in the 4x100-meter relay.

Howard held the third-fastest 100-meter sprint time with 11.22 seconds before going into last year's district meet, and he broke his personal record by running 11.12 in the preliminaries and 11.15 in the finals. After finishing third in the preliminary race for the 200-meter dash, Howard burst back out and took first place in the finals with a time of 22.95 seconds.

"He should be named athlete of the year for what he did," Knutson said of Howard's per-

formance.

Although Howard's relay team took second place in the 4x100, the team finished in 43.72 seconds and broke a Cottage Grove record that had been standing for 12 years. Howard accomplished all of this in a league that had four sprinters ranked in the top 10 for 4A schools.

Cottage Grove will also miss its dominance in high hurdles, where Michael Tharpe flourished in his final year at Cottage Grove. Tharpe won gold in the 110-meter high hurdles with a time of 14.98 seconds, achieving his goal of breaking the 15-second mark. He also joined Howard in the 100-meter sprint with a time of 11.30 seconds (automatically qualifying for

state).

But Knutson and his team do not despair without these key athletes.

"We are hoping to have more of a reload mentality as opposed to a rebuilding one," he said. The Lions will return with Tucker Porter, who placed at state in the triple jump, along with others such as Konrad Raum who qualified for state in the 3000-meter race. The record-setting relay team will only bring back Jacob Woods, but Knutson says he will have help from sprinters and jumpers such as Chad Bortoff, Hayden Glenn, Cooper Ladd, Erik Giffen and Juice Claffen. Many of these names were prevalent

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Athletes of the Week

South Valley Athletic's fifth and sixth-grade basketball champions



Team Orange Crush

Front row: Kalen Rinck and Rylan Springer

Back row: Coach Boyd Rinck, Jaedon Lindsay, Tristan Kane, Bryant Baros, Jordan Wilson, Javin Hemenway, Coach Brian Kane.



Team: Navy Seals

Left to right: Coach Tom Perkins, Izzy Stere, Eliana Piltz, Selena Matney, Jerzie Epperson, Payton Bickford, Summer Lebow, Haylee Sowa and Coach Dewey Epperson.

Roseburg football team looks to Cottage Grove to establish roster

The Roseburg Valley Thunder football team is an opportunity for football athletes to play at the semi-pro level during the winter and summer. With less daylight during the winter, the team's roster dwindled.

"People weren't getting off of work until after it was dark, so a lot of them weren't able to play," said Rick Winkley. The team had about 40 players at one point, but as winter came, the Thunder was playing with only 14 players.

To buff up the roster, Winkley has taken to Cottage Grove, where he hopes to garner interest and participation from CG football players.

"This is a man's league; it's not for the weak or pretenders," the team posted on its Facebook

page. "Players come and go on these teams because they start out thinking it's high school. I assure you, it's not."

The team plays in a full-contact semi-pro league and Winkley is looking to create a powerhouse within the state of Oregon.

"I challenge the young men to come out and help build the power house team that has eluded us since semi-pro was introduced back in the mid 90s," Winkley wrote.

The team is now accepting summer league sign-ups and daily conditioning is scheduled to start on April 3. Interested football enthusiasts are encouraged to contact Winkley at 541-817-6065.