

## Community R-6 opens season with three-inning victory over Wellsville



Community R-6 sophomore Kyler Swaim pitches on Monday against Wellsville-Middletown at home in Laddonia. Swaim and the Trojans opened this season with a 15-0 three-inning victory.

[Jeremy Jacob]

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

It didn't matter to Community R-6 that it was cold Monday or that it went to a Final Four last year.

What mattered is that this season started off strong, and the Trojans did with a 15-0 three-inning win at home over district foe Wellsville-Middletown. They were able to warm up sooner inside after sophomore Kyler Swaim, in his first career varsity game, hit a bases-clearing double to trigger the run-rule victory.

"My team was cheering me on, and after the hit, they said they thought it was going to go

out," Swaim said. "It was just an amazing feeling to hit a walkoff to win it."

Swaim's walk-off followed a shutout third inning with three strikeouts, which was preceded by two shutout innings with four strikeouts by Mason Carroll. Wellsville didn't manage a single hit and had one baserunner via a walk while Community finished with 10 hits and five doubles.

Prior to Monday, Swaim didn't think he would pitch in the game. Community shot ahead 10-0 after two innings to give Carroll an opportunity to limit his pitches before a game

See **TROJANS** on page B2

## Events on deck

### Today

#### Baseball

Mexico at Marshall 5 p.m.

#### Boys tennis

Mexico at Jefferson City 4:30 p.m.

#### Boys golf

Mexico in Mexico quad vs Hannibal, Centralia, Louisiana 4 p.m.

### Thursday

#### Baseball

Community R-6 vs Marion County 5 p.m.

North Callaway at Hallsville 5 p.m.

Missouri Military Academy vs Mark Twain 5 p.m.

Paris at Sturgeon 5 p.m.

#### Boys tennis

Mexico vs Battle 4:30 p.m.

Missouri Military Academy at Capital City 4:30 p.m.

#### Track and field

Centralia at Monroe City Open

#### Boys golf

Paris vs New Bloomfield, Fayette, Harrisburg, Moberly in Salisbury

### Friday

#### Baseball

Mexico vs Eldon 5 p.m.

Van-Far vs Tusculumbia 5 p.m.

North Callaway at Fulton 5 p.m.

Centralia vs Fayette 5 p.m.

#### Boys tennis

Mexico vs Fulton 4:30 p.m.

#### Track and field

Community R-6, Van-Far, Paris at Paris HS Open

North Callaway, Missouri Military Academy at New Bloomfield Wildcat Relays

#### Boys golf

Mexico, Missouri Military Academy at Fulton quad

### Saturday

#### Baseball

Mexico vs Hermann in Ashland 11 a.m.

Mexico at Southern Boone in Ashland 4 p.m.

Centralia vs Calvary Lutheran 10 a.m.

Centralia vs Brookfield noon

#### Girls soccer

Mexico at Chris Hotop Classic in Mexico

### Monday

#### Baseball

Community R-6 vs Paris with Faith Walk 5 p.m.

Van-Far at Hermann 4:30 p.m.

North Callaway at California 5 p.m.

Missouri Military Academy at Versailles 5 p.m.

Centralia vs Clark County 5 p.m.

#### Girls soccer

Mexico vs Wright City 4:30 p.m.

#### Track and field

Missouri Military Academy, Paris at South Shelby HS Open

#### Boys golf

Van-Far, Paris at Paris quad vs Canton, Glasgow

### Tuesday

#### Baseball

Mexico at Kirksville 5 p.m.

Community R-6 at Silex 5 p.m.

Van-Far at North Callaway 5 p.m.

Missouri Military Academy at Madison 5 p.m.

Paris vs Monroe City 5 p.m.

#### Boys tennis

Mexico at School of the Osage 4 p.m.

#### Track and field

Mexico, Community R-6, North Callaway, Van-Far, Centralia at T-Bird Early In-vite in Kingdom City

#### Boys golf

Paris in Paris quad vs Glasgow, Salisbury, South Shelby

## CR-6 baseball hopes to 'crush' follow-up Final Four season

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

Community R-6 baseball had a rare deep run in the postseason last year.

Prior to advancing to the state Final Four last season, the Trojans had only one other Final Four appearance in 2001. However, this year's Trojans have been looking good so far to head coach Joel Krato and he believes another deep run is possible.

"Fall (season) wasn't as good as we wanted to be, coming off a Final Four run, and you lose a couple good pieces in all-state players," Krato said. "We crushed the weight room this offseason. Crushed it. We had a lot of kids putting in extra work on their own time because we are not happy with how it went. Honestly, I know we had quite the run last year, but I think this team also could be one of those teams that is dangerous come postseason."

Community finished 5-6 during its fall season, playing top-tier talent from across Class 1 and 2. It had to be done without all-state players Gavin Allen and Ayden Meranda, who are both part of college programs after graduating.

Krato said he noticed how the Trojans have been hitting and throwing the ball harder and have been faster since the fall season. As the spring season has drawn closer, their intensity seems to be on a "whole other level," including

See **CR-6** on page B2



Community R-6 junior Drake Welch pitches during the Trojans' jamboree last week in Laddonia. Welch slots into the second spot of the pitching rotation.

[Jeremy Jacob]



Mexico junior Wyatt Troesser fields a throw at first base during one of the Bulldogs' baseball practices before this season.

[Jeremy Jacob]

## Mexico baseball countering inexperience with versatility

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

Mexico baseball had a large senior contingent last season.

The Bulldogs are moving on from their eight seniors – four starters – from a year ago with a roster of 31 that includes one senior. They are doing that mainly with having those kids be ready to play just about anywhere.

"There is plenty of opportunity to take over a spot, take over the mound and I want to make sure the kids seize the opportunity," head coach Daniel McCarty said. "Come into workouts, practice, games, whether you are fine-tuning things or in the groove, people see that and people feed off of that player-wise."

The main goals McCarty said he would like to accomplish with the Bulldogs this year, and a reason he has been "stressing" since summer last year is he wants to make all of his kids are ready to battle and they have less growing pains.

Having several non-seniors return-

ing from plenty of playing time a year ago helps, including kids like Sam Ryan, Austin Maxwell, Landon Hilderman and Drew DeMint. Ryan and Maxwell are expected to slot into the pitching rotation along with junior varsity standout from a season ago Brady Fox. Tyson Carr and Jaydon Eldridge are in the running for other rotation spots, but McCarty said everybody on varsity can pitch.

"Of our 21 guys we are carrying on varsity this year, everyone can pitch," McCarty said. "It's not really normal, but we've stressed the last few years about how you always need quality pitching and people who will focus on the principles of throwing quality strikes and getting ahead of people. Our kids were like, 'I can do that' so our kids took on that program and are excellent."

McCarty has much confidence already in throwing several kids out to the mound and also in his returning

See **BULLDOGS** on page B4

## Mexico girls soccer with plenty of roster options

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

In her time at Mexico, Sarah Olson hasn't seen a girls soccer team as big as this season's.

She has four seasons under her belt as an assistant coach and a head coach and said she has about 30 girls coming out this season in her second head coaching season. The sophomores make up the biggest portion at 12 due to several deciding to join the team this year and some of the six seniors are foreign exchange students with little to no experience.

Olson said conditioning is important for all players to have still but believes it will be easier for everybody if there are more girls available in the rotation.

"Numbers, in itself, is a big strength," Olson said. "If you have some equality even in your

bench players, you could give someone a decent break who is a starter and not be hurting too much."

The defensive rotation won't change that much according to Olson since Mexico returns three of its four defensive starters including Liz Joiner, Addison Paden and two-time all-conference player Kenley Jones. Defense is an area that benefits greatly from having the same faces.

"It is nice to have some cohesions back there," Olson said. "They see, especially our center-back, the whole field and are a guiding voice for everyone."

The Lady Bulldogs' leading scorers from a year ago are back including Claire Hudson and all-conference player Emily Moppin. Marali Herrera also returns after "controlling the middle" of the field for Mexico



Mexico junior Kenley Jones handles the ball during a practice for the Mexico girls soccer team.

[Jeremy Jacob]

last year.

Among the five freshmen Olson has, she said doesn't have girls that are unfamiliar with the

sport as Aunna Bessolo, Brenda Matuz and Kaili Cox all played

See **LADY BULLDOGS** on page B2

Track and field previews for Van-Far, North Callaway and MMA on page B5

## Mexico track and field brings bigger boys team scoring potential

As is the case with previous years, Mexico track and field has more boys than girls.

Head coach Bucky Green said that number for the boys is even larger this season with a sizable freshman class and a good bulk of juniors. Some of those boys are returning state qualifiers as well.

Charlie Fisher, Tyler Grimes, Alex Rowan and Davontae Frame each made up several state relay teams for Mexico while Grimes also ran in the 800 meters. No medals were won from last year, but this year is a new season. Green said having bigger numbers and other returning letterwinners like hurdler Guy Fairchild, runners Tave Potter, Andrew Peuster and Carter Nading and thrower Eli Arnold will help the team.

"I believe that we will see a vast improvement in team points as we will score in more events," Green said. "Our goals at this point will be focused on individual growth and improvement."

Among the returning girl letterwinners are runners Alexis Smythe, Maggie Ramsey and Ella Raines, hurdler Emma Seibert, jumper Lucy Gleason and runner and pole vaulter Alexandra Terry.

Green said he is blessed to have a quality coaching staff that includes distance coach, and cross country head coach in the fall, Lucas Breneman; Leslie Dickherber, who will coach throwers and others; and Greg Jackson, who will coach sprints and relays. Mexico adds Katie French as a thrower coach, which she knows something about after being a multiple-time NAIA All-American shot put thrower at William Woods University in Fulton. Austin Miller is retired but will make some appearances, Green said.

"This team has been working hard, making use of the good weather and showing very positive signs," Green said. "We have some new faces that we are excited about."

## Community R-6 track and field relay teams going for redemption

Community R-6 track and field was close to having more state representation a season ago.

Victoria DiSalvo and Gavin Allen each qualified in their senior years, but Community has several athletes wanting to make up for how last season ended.

Head coach Trenton Pummill said the girls and boys each had relay teams that had state potential but couldn't advance further. The girls 4x100 team consisting of returners Alyssa Beamer and Adriana Woodson missed state by four-tenths of a second while the 4x100 boys team that has Aaron and Lane Carter were disqualified at districts due to exchanging the baton out of the zone.

"A major strength for this season will be our relays for both boys and girls," Pummill said. "We have

multiple options for each leg in every relay, so if an injury or dip in production occurs, we have backups who can effectively fill those roles if need be."

Pummill said he believes Community's state-meet streak of five years will be extended due to the promise of these relay teams. Peyton Schafer replaces the graduated Sarah Angel as the lead for the girls 4x100 and 4x200 teams, and Kylie Brooks will slot in to the 4x100 team along with long and triple jump events following a junior-year hiatus. Caden Thomas and Masom Carroll will be newcomers to round out the boys 4x100 team.

Pummill said there are plenty more kids to be excited about, including newcomers Brett Beamer, Mason Rohan, Will Swaim

and Nick Henke, who will all appear on the boys 4x800 relay after Community went a long time without one. Those boys make up 17 – 13 freshman – of the new varsity track athletes of the 31 Community has this season.

"Weaknesses this season will be the inexperience at the varsity level for over half of our athletes," Pummill said. "I look for this weakness to be short term, as once those athletes get into the routine of what a varsity track meet looks like, they will rise to the level of their competitors."

Pummill said the Lady Trojans were seven points away from third place at the Central Activities Conference meet so he hopes to make it in the top three this season. He said there are 10 school records within reach.

## Lady Bulldogs from page B1

for the Mexico YMCA Fire Soccer Club in middle school.

Olson said those freshmen have skills and can step up this season, but even for those not as skilled yet, the Lady Bulldogs have camaraderie. She jokes that the girls never seem to run out of "silliness," but that is good since it keeps the environment light.

"They are happy to be here, they get along with each other and they are hard workers," Olson said. "That's what comes first. A lot of these girls are not super skilled at soccer. When I played at first, I was not super skilled. If the work ethic is there, the other things will follow."

Olson admits that having many inexperienced players means a lack of soccer knowledge, but that is only at the beginning of development. She said the Lady Bulldogs have been taught proper positioning during various situations, which will become even more clear once more games are played.

Mexico did technically play other teams already but in the context of a pre-season jamboree at Southern Boone in Ashland. The Lady Bulldogs tied Southern Boone 1-1 and lost 2-1 to Fulton.

"I did see a lot of things that we talked about last year that maybe didn't come to pass a ton until the end of the year happening in those jamborees," Olson said. "There was a lot of passing, a lot of communication and people taking shots – don't wait or hesitate, take the shot – and those two goals came off of those things."

Mexico will adjust at goalkeeper, but Olson insists it won't be as big of an adjustment. Tessa Haefling, who etched her name near the top of the MSHSAA record books in her career along with earning multiple all-conference selections, graduated so it will be Katie Crews as the primary option in goal. Cox can back her up from her experience for the Fire club, but Crews brings 10 varsity games of experience due to Haefling not being able to go in goal due to injury.

"She had to play a lot of big games for us," Olson said. "It was definitely a loss, but hopefully that will get filled in, and she'll gain some confidence back."

Mexico recorded its third straight 20-loss season a year ago, but like Olson said when she was hired, the wins will follow as long as the Lady Bulldogs keep achieving small goals.

"My first goal as a teacher and as a coach is to become a better you," Olson said. "If you start there instead of saying we're going to win 15 games, then I think you can always be happy with progress because that is very attainable. You then start adding in those goals slowly like the other night at our jamboree, we made a small goal to score a goal and we did that."

## CR-6 from page B1

lifting on Thanksgiving morning.

One of those examples is with Drake Welch, who will slot in as the team's No. 2 pitcher behind the returning all-state pitcher and short-stop Mason Carroll – 1.05 ERA and .314 batting average along with 24 RBI a season ago. Welch has gained about 10 miles per hour since the fall and could make the Trojans dangerous with another formidable one-two punch on the mound.

"His big thing is coming out and throwing strikes and staying confident," Krato said. "If Drake Welch can be our No. 2, we're going to be really freakin' dangerous."

Krato said Mason and Cooper Rohan can both fill up the strike zone, and Eli Johnson can pitch. Johnson won't have to worry about saving his arm for catching since Lane Carter will be behind the plate this season.

Johnson did a great behind the plate a year ago, Krato said, but Carter is also a really good receiver and Johnson is so athletic that the Trojans benefit by him playing in the infield. Johnson gives them another bat along with Carroll with home-run power and just another bat returning from the starting lineup as is the case with first baseman Brant Cope and Mason Rohan.

"It allows for a kid like Lane to play," Krato said. "Eli's probably our second-best athlete, if not our best athlete. Losing Gavin and losing Ayden, it helps plug holes we were missing in the field."

Krato said Community seems like a new team "across the board" with

freshmen like Lance Wohlbold and Caden Thomas expecting to play third base and left field and sophomore Cooper Rohan expecting to be somewhere. But, even if the kids are different, Krato said the ways Community can win games hasn't changed.

During their postseason run, whenever Krato or the Trojans wanted to put down a bunt, they usually were successful and took every opportunity to take the extra base. Krato said even his all-stater Carroll volunteered to lay down a bunt even though his four home runs are the most for any kid in Krato's tenure. The Trojans aren't a one-dimensional team that can only win one way.

"We have so many different ways we can beat you," Krato said. "You can throw Mason Carroll on the mound and he can throw a shut-out, defensively we should be able to make plays, offensively we can swing the bats almost better than any team I've had here and we play the small-ball really well."

Krato said his kids have the good baseball IQ to recognize the proper actions to take a situation like with the aforementioned Carroll example of him wanting to bunt for not seeing the ball well at that specific moment.

Community still wants to "play for May" and believes that the most important thing for the team is to be at its best for postseason.

"The only games that matter is the postseason," Krato said. "We spend the entire season trying to get ready for when it matters. At the end of the day, who cares if we lose our first 10 games of the year? The only game that matters, when it comes to the postseason, is the game we're playing in the postseason."



**Community R-6 senior Mason Rohan slides into first base after reaching safely via a hit on Monday against Wellsville-Middletown at home in Laddonia. The Trojans finished with 10 hits and five doubles, having all nine batters reach base at least once.**

[Jeremy Jacob]

## Trojans from page B1

the next day at Clopton in Clarksville.

"Fastball was working," Swaim said. "I couldn't get my offspeed in the zone, and I just threw as hard as I could."

Head coach Joel Krato said Swaim earned the opportunity to pitch after months of work. He said Swaim is a kid who can be convincing since he initially didn't plan to have Swaim pitch any varsity innings this season but changed his mind after seeing some quality bullpen sessions from him. Krato said it is also nice he is a left-hander after having a right-handed dominant staff a year ago.

"That kid puts in a ton of work in the weight room and comes in early every morning," Krato said. "He stays after school every day to get swings in. That's just a

kid whose hard work is paying off. He doesn't throw particularly hard, but he's left-handed and throws strikes. He's going to throw hard next year for us."

Krato said he thought Wellsville was a team Community should beat, and his team impressed him with how strong they looked. That began with the Trojans' horse Carroll, who is coming off an all-state season. Carroll only allowed two balls in play, and both were fielded by him for outs.

"Mason came just pumping," Krato said. "He kept it under (pitchable) so he's still available to go to tomorrow and we can still use him Thursday. Anytime your pitchers can stay low on their pitch count, it makes life a whole lot easier."

Krato said Monday was an early indicator of the type of offense Community has this season. He thought they would be better than last year

and looked a lot better than they looked during the fall season, saying the Trojans might have had more doubles Monday than in their 11 fall games.

Every Trojan reached base at least once and all of them except two reached base via a hit. Swaim led with three RBI on his game-ending hit, and Drake Welch, Cooper Rohan and Nik Krider – in the freshman's first career varsity game – each followed with two RBI. Brant Cope went 2-for-3 with a RBI double, and Eli Johnson was 2-for-3 with three runs scored from the leadoff spot.

"This lineup – 1 through 9 – barrels. Hard-hit balls," Krato said. "We swung the bat up and down the lineup well. Last year, we had four kids who swung it well, and we relied on the two arms. This year, we have a lineup of kids, and it's going to be exciting to watch."

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# Van-Far baseball undergoing fresh start

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

Van-Far baseball is going to look a lot different from previous years.

The Indians' roster this season has little similarity with Van-Far from even a year ago and the program even has a new head coach. Cameron Huff takes over in his first head coaching job after graduating from college and being an all-conference and all-district catcher for Wellsville-Middletown when they finished second in the state in 2017 and won a district title in 2019.

Huff is aware that 2018 is the last time Van-Far baseball won a district title and that the program has only six wins in the four seasons after that. He hopes having an increase of kids of 22 from about nine a year ago will be the beginning of good things.

"I was able to get a lot of boys," Huff said. "I recruited a lot of boys from football – a lot of our athletes. I was like, 'Hey, give baseball a shot.' We're looking alright right now."

One of the kids he convinced was his younger brother Carson Huff, who just finished a solid season with the basketball program after transferring in from Wellsville-Middletown. The coaching staff is also excited to



Van-Far junior Tyson Douglas plays catch at one of the Indians' baseball practices before this season.

[Jeremy Jacob]

welcome transfers from Fulton: twin brothers Malik and Tyson Douglas. The Douglas brothers each made the football all-conference team for Fulton this past season after playing football and baseball for Saint Jeanne de Lestonnac Catholic in the state of California.

Having that many more kids means Van-Far will have a junior varsity squad this year, Huff said, but also that competitiveness will be brought out as boys fight for limited varsity spots. Ultimately, the coaching staff that includes Dustin Elledge and

Josh Buatte has more options and boys are less likely to be playing out of position.

"It makes it so much simpler with more boys," Huff said. "They can learn from each other. I have a great group of upper-classmen who are leaders. Gage Gibson takes change in the middle infield."

Huff emphasized he wants to build a program that will earn or at least compete for a district title within the next two years. The greater number of players means there will be quite a few boys with little to no baseball ex-

perience, but Huff sees that as an advantage.

"A lot of coaches are like, 'We're going to be inexperienced and going to be down' but I look at inexperience as a plus," Huff said. "They don't have bad habits yet. I can teach them proper ways to play."

Huff said the number of returning players includes Gibson, Reece Culwell, Gibson Condie, Tarion Aguirre and Bransen Salmon. Culwell is an all-conference player and the only returning all-conference Indian with the loss of Nikos Connaway to the golf team.

Culwell was Van-Far's No. 1 pitcher a season ago with a 3.32 ERA in about 50 innings pitched and expects to fill that role again. Huff expects Tyson Douglas and Carson Huff to slot in behind him and others like freshmen Ronnie Stanich Jr. and Brady Puls to be in the mound mix.

At the plate, Culwell had a .275 average and .431 on-base percentage and leads Huff's key returners.

"He's going to take a big role on his shoulders this season," Huff said. "Gage Gibson is another returner that's going to take a big role (at second base) and Gibson Condie is going to have a big role on his shoulders. He's a catcher, and I was a catcher myself so I've been working with him."

State qualifier cross country runner Garrett Hopke is among the group of freshman Huff has his eye on. Gaven Gaston is a sophomore joining the team that will be patrol center field, the Douglas brothers bring great bats and gloves to the team, senior and college football signee Blake Foster brings quickness.

Funnily enough, Huff said the runner Hopke is probably the team's slowest guy even though he is still pretty quick in a sprint. That's just how much speed the Indians have with their roster.

"We've got speed so we're going to aggressive on the basepaths this year," Huff said. "We'll look to utilize that speed to our best interests."

Huff wants to win "year after year after year" to establish a winning culture to baseball like the school has in football and basketball.

"Coach (Pat) Connaway did great things with these guys," Huff said. "Taking them to the next step is what I want to do."

Van-Far lost its opening game on Monday to Calvary Lutheran 5-4 in Jefferson City. Reece Culwell had more than six innings pitched with 13 strikeouts, but the Indians allowed unearned runs in the sixth inning before Calvary Lutheran's walk-off winner. Tyson Douglas and Caron Huff each a RBI.

# North Callaway baseball welcomes one of its biggest rosters

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

There are a lot of Thunderbirds on the diamond this spring.

North Callaway baseball saw a big increase in its roster under first-year head coach Kirt Kleindienst, who played for the program in the early 2000s before eventually returning as an assistant coach the previous two years. The 32 that came out this year is the second-most kids on a North Callaway baseball roster.

"We have a lot of enthusiasm amongst younger kids all the way to the senior class," Kleindienst said. "I've coached a

lot of the players in the past when they were younger so there is a mix of enthusiasm of success for the program and familiarity with the new coach. All of that put together is so far so good."

After playing junior college and then Division I baseball for Eastern Kentucky University, Kleindienst spent years coaching youth baseball, which he admitted involved him overseeing much less kids any given year. Still, it has been a fun new challenge for him as the head coach.

North Callaway has about 12 freshmen this season while the seniors make up the smallest portion of the roster. That contrasts from the seven seniors

for the Thunderbirds a year ago that filled five starting spots, but Kleindienst has several boys with plenty of experience on which he can rely.

"Sam Pezold is workhorse on the mound and at third base," Kleindienst said. "Carter Moore behind the plate is just taking a leadership role that every coach wants a catcher to take. Keaton Bell is a returning starter that has played everywhere over the last few years but is establishing himself at shortstop now."

The all-conference Pezold returns a 3.27 ERA, and Bell owned a 2.36 ERA and were the two North Callaway relied on for good innings near the end of the season and into postseason. Among

the others on North Callaway's pitching staff this season is Moore, who had a 1.31 ERA in four appearances a year ago, first baseman AJ Haubner brings a left-handed arm, Sheets' velocity is up from previous years.

"Our pitching depth will be deeper than last year," Kleindienst said. "With Sam, Carter and Keaton leading the way off the bump, we'll go from there."

Kleindienst said Kyle Pennell is another dependable kid, especially at the plate, that returns a .343 average and 14 RBI from last season to the lineup. Pennell can catch and play the outfield and

See **T-BIRDS** on page B5

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## 70 Years... and Counting!

# Missouri Military Academy baseball building from ground up

BY JEREMY JACOB  
Sports Editor

The turnover at a military school is challenging for coaches. Missouri Military Academy baseball head coach Thomas Roberts encounters an almost entirely different roster this season after losing eight starters and six pitchers from last season's 9-9 squad that finished with the program's most wins since 1969.

The Colonels will have some returning from last year, including shortstop Luke Wolf and outfielder Avin Hernandez, but almost everybody else is either new to the team or baseball or both. The reasons include graduation and other explanations, but Roberts said this year's group is trying to learn.

"We're just going to be a process of trying to construct something," Roberts said. "It's going to be tough to scratch out any wins, but it's good if they learn something and enjoy playing the game, and as a team, keep each other accountable."

The area where it hurts the most to build from the ground up, Roberts said, is the pitching staff as he had several kids that could pitch last year. None of them returned so he is trying several new arms this season to see if they can stick to the mound.

MMA was able to play in a pre-season jamboree at Community R-6 in Laddonia and tried out Sam Stevens, who has displayed good control early but obviously needs more work, and Hernandez is anticipated to take the mound for the Colonels this year but was out sick during the jamboree.

"The biggest problem is pitching," Roberts said. "Last year, I was blessed with six pitchers and two left-handers. We're trying to mesh nine guys together to make a pitcher."

Roberts said high school teams that do well typically have five kids who can pitch so he is hopeful MMA can eventually reach that number again. It's just going



Missouri Military Academy baseball head coach Thomas Roberts installs MMA junior Luke Wolf as the new pitcher during the Colonels' jamboree games last week at Community R-6 in Laddonia.

[Jeremy Jacob]

to take time.

It will take time for the lineup to become deeper as well as Roberts said MMA is about four guys deep. After the four guys of Stevens, catcher Zachary Tillock, Wolf and Hernandez, the Colonels need some more bats to develop before they could possibly reach the 6.2 runs per game average from a season ago. Roberts said seeing 60-70 miles per hour can be a wake-up call for the uninitiated.

"Once we get past that point (in the lineup), we're hurting," Roberts said. "They need to get a little experience in the batter's box. Hopefully they get a couple of high and tight ones and figure it out."

Roberts said Stevens and Tillock have shown promise at shortstop and catcher as well. Still, he said

he has plenty of kids playing out of position or out of their comfort zone to fill the various holes around the diamond. This led to some errors during that jamboree, but experience will cure those ills as is the case with the other areas of the team.

The learning period doesn't apply to players, though, as Roberts said it applies to him as a coach. Every kid needs a different coaching approach. Even with the lofty challenge ahead, he said he is still excited to see where these kids can go.

"We're playing with a lot of errors as well so we're just going to have to go through struggles," Roberts said. "As a coach, you just can't give up and you just keep working at it. Keep them engaged so they're not disheartened after taking loss after loss."

## Bulldogs from page B1

position players like the all-district third baseman Ryan, shortstop Maxwell and centerfielder DeMint, who McCarty mentions is on pace to break Andrew Runge's all-time stolen base record he set a year ago. Despite losing Ty Sims behind the plate, McCarty said he has confidence in Cooper Bledsoe at catcher from the games he played for junior varsity.

Fox could have a big breakout season, McCarty said, after eventually working his way up last season to pitch in some varsity games. His son, Chance, could take over the role at second base. McCarty said he expects even them and the other younger players to ready to compete even against tough opponents like the first two on Mexico's schedule: Houston (20-6 a year ago) and Portageville (35-2 and a state Final Four a year ago).

"These guys have been competing since June 1," McCarty said. "After our season ended, the very next day - June 1 - started for our summer baseball. We've always had 25+ guys come out for summer ball so these guys have been working since June 1."

Those aforementioned games oc-

curred in a Wood Bat Tournament, which sounds strange for a sport dominated by metal bats, but McCarty said every Bulldog other than freshmen is accustomed to wood bats. They have been doing all their work with wood in an effort to improve.

"Since we don't have many seniors and we're all speed and no power - a single-hitting team - I feel the urge to go to all wood bats for practice, jamborees and our scrimmages (until March 18)," McCarty said. "I'm hoping that will pay off because a wood bat makes you square up the ball more. If you don't square up the ball, you're going to break your bat and/or it's going to sting."

McCarty wants the Bulldogs to be used to district play and perhaps make another run like they did last season when they advanced to the district title game, which decided by a tight 2-1 margin to Macon. As usual, he wants them to be used to limiting their "freebies" - walks, hit by pitches or errors - to less than two per game.

"Those are baserunners for free, basically," McCarty said. "If we can do that per game, we have a very good shot at winning the ballgame."

Mexico began its season 1-3 after four games in the Wood Bat tournament held in Mountain View. The Bulldogs beat East Carter 9-4 to finish the weekend but lost 1-0 to Houston, 9-4 to Portageville and 4-3 to Ellington.

# Boys tennis ready for first serves

Mexico boys tennis hoping to take advantage of historic year

Mexico boys tennis had a program first last season. Brendan McKeown became the program's first ever state medalist by finishing seventh last year at the Class 1 meet and hopes to be the first multiple-time medalist with his senior year coming up. The Bulldogs feel they can do even better than a season ago.

Head coach Tony Senor said it was a good season that included a third-place conference finish, a district runner-up performance and a 6-11 record after going through a tough schedule. Senor believes Mexico can compete for a conference and district title this season and send at least someone else with McKeown to state this year.

"We are a very young team but we are led by very strong experience from our seniors Brendan McKeown and Trevor Wright. Brendan will also shine when it comes time for districts and the possibility to qualify and medal again at state."

McKeown and Wright are among the eight returners for the Bulldogs this season including all-conference player Boston Davolt, who Senor thinks can "do big things" in singles and doubles. Brixton Goerne, Carter Blackburn and David Schweim bring previous varsity experience to the team, and Jonathan St. Martin and Skylar Shaw are going into their second year looking for growth.

Mexico also has five new players on its roster. The Bulldogs lost their first dual of the season 7-2 on Monday at Ft. Zumwalt East. Boston Davolt and Carter Blackburn each won their matches 8-4.

Missouri Military Academy tennis wants to pick up where it left off

Missouri Military Academy tennis has made postseason runs a habit.

The three-time reigning district champions sent three more to the state tournament a year ago, including returning player Samuel Way in doubles and want to accomplish all of that and more this season.

"All but one of my varsity players are district champions in team play and half of them have been state qualifiers individually in the last few years," head coach Brad Smith said. "Our goal is to win districts again in class 2 this year and qualify as many cadets as possible to the individual state tournament. Our goal is to play aggressive, consistent, and competitive tennis with every school we compete against this year."

Smith pointed out that the move up to Class 2, due to earning so many points from postseason play, didn't faze MMA as it continued to rack up postseason accomplishments. He is confident that will be the case this season as the Colonels have past state experience with Nathan Dempsey and Jose Anguiano.

Dempsey and Way also earned the distinction of breaking the school career wins record along with graduated state qualifier Gorke Yarte. Way is currently in front at 64 wins, but Dempsey is at his heels with 63 wins.

MMA began its season with a 7-2 win Friday at Hickman and then defeated Columbia Independent 8-1 on Monday at home. Henry Scribner, Gabriel Iglesias and Nathan Dempsey won all of their matches in the duals.



Good luck, athletes!

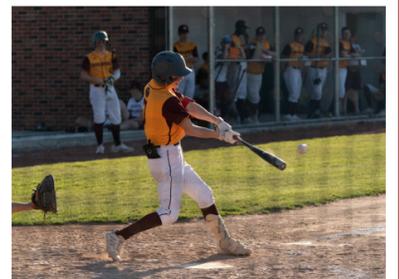
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Mexico senior Aidan Knipfel competes at a boys golf meet last season.

[Jeremy Jacob]

## Boys golf to tee off this spring

### Mexico boys golf looking for return to state

Aidan Knipfel has represented Mexico boys golf at state before.

The senior missed qualifying last year but wants to earn his third career berth to the state tournament.

Head coach Becca Bates said Knipfel is expected to play well and is among a group of solid returners that includes senior Kaiden Doebelin and junior Jake Stephens. Bates said Doebelin's work has caused some noticeable improvement in his game already, and Stephens is hitting the ball a lot better than his previous two years.

Bates said Mexico has 13 on the roster this season with only one freshman Matt Painter.

"We are having some really good range sessions and on course play," Bates said. "The only thing we might be in our own way with is the mental game or the grind to finish a round strong and not give up. Overall, we are looking really good and I'm very excited for this season."

### Van-Far golf brings quality among smaller numbers

Van-Far golf might not have a ton of kids but has several standouts.

Pat Connaway takes over in his first high school golfing head coaching job this season and will lead a roster of six kids, including freshman Kaleb Baskett, sophomores Pacey Reading and Kasen Christian, junior Kaden Whiteaker, and seniors Clara Wallace and Nikos Connaway.

Reading is coming off a freshman season where he qualified for state along with the graduated Cody Smith and was all-conference. He and Christian were varsity golfers last year.

"They are a great group of kids that joke around and push each other to be better," Connaway said. "It is a very competitive group."

Connaway believes Baskett can be the next one to have a strong freshman season as he brings much skill to the sport already. Connaway's son, Nikos, is coming off an all-state basketball season that has played multiple sports in his high school career.

Despite the lack of numbers and experience, Connaway hopes to compete at districts and take a team to state this season.

## T-Birds from page B3

first base.

Caleb Sheets is a new starter that has shown "fantastic" hustle and tracking so far that will fit well in center field. Chance Green and Tucker Sheets are sophomores Kleindienst expects to be "impact players" for varsity.

Kleindienst said the hustle has been great across the board for varsity and junior varsity and would like to see flawless defense spread throughout the team. He said he was "a defensive-minded baseball player at heart" that loved taking hits away as much as getting hits, playing at every position except first base, pitcher and catcher in college following his time as the Thunderbirds' shortstop.

"At the high school level, errors are key," Kleindienst said. "If you can throw strikes and can catch the ball, you're in most games. Errors have crept their way into the program in the past. When we've struggled, that's why. All-around defensively, that's where we're making great strides and where we need to improve the most along with baserunning."

North Callaway achieved its highest win total with last year's 15-9 record since its 19-5 mark in 2012. Kleindienst wants his players to start with what he considers to be must-haves for any team.

"Coming out and playing hard and being ready for every pitch," Kleindienst said. "If we do those two things, baseball takes care of itself. We have a great group of kids getting that started in the right direction."

## Track and field to explode off blocks

### Van-Far track and field going for goals on new track

Two years after being dedicated, Van-Far track and field will host meets this year on its all-weather track.

It is one of the new aspects for the program this season as Van-Far hosts two varsity and one junior varsity meet. Van-Far also has 10 freshmen joining the team this year out of the total 29 on the roster.

Head coach Kris Cross said she hopes those new faces can accomplish personal goals throughout the season and follow the lead of Van-Far's returning athletes. Gage Gibson is at the top of the team's crop of returners, being Van-Far's only sectional qualifier a year ago. Gibson finished seventh at sectionals in the 300-meter hurdles to miss state.

"We overall hope to have a few more qualifiers for sectionals this year and then some to move on to state," Cross said. "My goal always is for the athletes to improve in their times during the year and find success in their own personal goals."

Gibson is one of seven boys that will participate in baseball and track in the spring out of the total 18 boys on the roster. Cross said Jackson Fischer and Evan Utterback are returning throwers she expects to see great things out of too since they placed at several meets last season.

Out of the 11 girls on the roster, Cross is looking forward to seeing good things out of returners McKenna Engh-Hoffman, Erin Childs and Trinity Skwartz. Liek the boys having 13 underclassmen, the girls have a fair amount of younger kids with eight.

"They are a young team

this year so we hope to see a lot of growth throughout the season in times, throws and jumps," Cross said.

### North Callaway track and field looking to make it past sectionals

North Callaway track and field has veterans that could go far this season.

Seniors Isiah Craighead and Pressley Schmauch missed the Class 3 state meet by one or two spots in the boys javelin and girls 3,200-meter run, respectively, but are back for a follow-up campaign.

Head coach Reid Randolph said North Callaway is relatively inexperienced this season with its roster of 53 kids, including 10 seniors for the lowest portion on the roster and 28 freshmen and sophomores. He said the team's older kids could go far this season.

"Right now, for the boys, our field event groups are emerging as a pretty strong group," Randolph said. "For the girls, it is looking like we'll have some strong performers evenly spread throughout the events. Our outlook for the season will depend upon our veterans performing to their potential and the development of everyone else."

Randolph said some more of the North Callaway boys field athletes that return this season include sophomore jumper Austin Brown among other Thunderbirds who have competed in the past like senior and state champion wrestler Lane Kimbley, who expects to be a multi-event athlete, and junior middle-distance runners CJ Cunningham and Levi Drake.

For the girls, junior Faith Cash is the school record holder in the

javelin; junior Isabelle Borchering, senior Emily Martin, junior Cora Tripp and sophomore Grace Rasmussen compete on the track; sophomore Kymorie Myers and senior Cassidy Murphy are back in the field; and junior Lia Bondurant and senior Corynne Miller do events on the track and field.

A group of freshmen that bring a capability on the track and the field includes Rachelle Atterberry, Alex Craighead, Madyson Gordon, Megan Schmidt, Icey Tomlinson, Cade Miller and Collin Moore while Emerson Reinhard is a distance runner and Gunnar Weneker is a thrower.

Randolph said winning a meet at Hermann was a highlight of last season, and the team wants to be in the mix for team titles this season.

### Missouri Military Academy organizing on track for another state appearance

Missouri Military Academy track and field has been putting thought into how it uses its roster.

The Colonels had their second straight season of a state presence that they want to turn into a streak of three years so head coach Traevonne Smith said roster management is important.

"My roster consists of most of the core at the school, so there's great detail in how we place kids in events and training for those events," Smith said. "Organization will be huge in preparation for all that."

Smith said the team's numbers could be a strength or weakness that will be fully clear at the end of the season. There are kids returning experience that will aid him and the coaching staff in developing the athletes but also a lot of new track athletes that will take time to develop.

"My goals for my athletes this season is simply to improve in their event from the beginning of the season," Smith said. "This will allow them to see the progress of hard work. And this is an attribute that they can carry with them for the rest of their lives."

He said some cadets that are returning and should be depended on this year include Ryan Miles, Samuel Stevens, Alexander McBride, Kyran Carter, Ky-Mani Erskine, and Bradley Thumbi. MMA's awards from a year ago included Miles as the "Most Dedicated," Erskine as the "Best Newboy" and McBride as the "Most Improved."

"I am high on each of these cadets because they bring high energy, determination, and leadership back this season," Smith said.



Have an amazing season!

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