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Young Tigers take to diamond

BY JEFF CHAMBERS
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With Mother Nature still flexing her winter muscles here in the Midwest, it's time for the boys of summer to begin another season of high school baseball.

Fresh off of their best winning percentage season in school history, the 2023 rendition of the Paris Tigers has numerous question marks. Heading into his 15th season as the coach of the Tigers, Creighton Tarr acknowledges that the lineup card this year will look nothing like the one from last season.

"We will have a lot of new guys in the lineup this year that we are going to count on after losing nine seniors to graduation." Those nine seniors led the way to a 26-3 record. The seniors this season (Brady Crippes, Chance Lehman, Landen Englum, Kody Crampton, Reed Stuck, and Owen Porter) are expected to lead the way and show the younger guys "the way things need to be done".

The key to success for any baseball team is their pitching. Tarr will need to find a way to replace 70% of the innings that were thrown by players that are not in the dugout this season. Tarr said, "Chance (Lehman) will be the ace of our pitching staff. Guys like Kody Crampton and Jaxen Tingley got some valuable experience on the mound during varsity games last year, and they will be asked to really eat up innings." Players who did not get experience on the mound last season, but will be counted on this year include juniors Sebastian Daugherty and Parker Underwood and sophomore Ty King. There will even be a few freshmen who will have a chance to take the hill to gain experience.

Offensively the Tigers return just three players with over 50 at-bats from last year's team that averaged nearly nine runs a game. Lehman, Englum, and Crippes each hit over .300 last year and will be batting near the top of the lineup this season. Ethan Curl and Stuck each saw limited at-bats last season, but will be counted on to produce this year. Daugherty, King, Nathan Trapp, Porter, Jackson Rigdon, and Conner Edwards will also be in the mix for playing time, with most players on this list playing multiple positions throughout the year. Some freshmen that will see playing time as well will be Sean Dunn, Carter Eastham, Gabe Roush, and Braydon Rogers.

Expectations are always high for the Tigers, but Tarr warned fans to be patient. "We



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

Creighton Tarr, left, and below, works with Paris Tiger infielders during practice earlier this week at the PHS baseball field. The Tigers are coming off a stellar 26-3 season but lost nine seniors to graduation, including pitchers who went who threw 70 percent of the team's innings.

will have some growing pains early on. But, if we all come together and just keep growing as a team, we will be a tough team as the season goes on." He continued, "Make no secret about it, we have a long way to go. Our guys are working hard and picking things up quickly. If we are able to handle the ups and downs and play with a competitive spirit, both mentally and physically, every game, we will be just fine."

Fortunately (even though the forecast looks terrible for opening week), the Tigers have been able to get work in outside. "We have been very fortunate to get decent weather, so we have been on the field nearly every practice. That is huge in helping us get ready for the season."

For the first week of the season, the Tigers



PHS boys track has more athletes, possibilities

SPECIAL TO THE PRAIRIE PRESS

It's a different start to the season for Paris boys track and field coach, with a bigger roster and an early season meet.

Fourth year coach Dan Dundas started in the spring of 2020 and after that, the roster was very thin for the past two seasons. 2023 has over 20 athletes, some playing two sports and still committing to track, which offers great flexibility, which wasn't available in earlier seasons.

The season began early this year, with their first visit to the EIU indoor meet in early March.

"It's an opportunity to get the season

ramped up sooner, and have kids get exposed to top competition early on. Last year we had some injuries out of the gate, and it put guys into different roles during a meet. Hopefully new depth can allow us to keep guys fresh and garner more points during meets."

The roster is primarily heavy on sprinters, or players from other sports looking to gain an edge in that department. There are two distance runners, one of which in freshmen Christian Perez looks promising. There is an influx of throwers this year at the younger levels, along with returning senior Gabe Winans, who placed 9th in the sectional meet last year.

"Gabe was a big part of our program last year, and he really excels at shot put. He seems

to build strength and technique as the season goes along, so I'm excited to see what he can do." Coach Dundas also added, "Matt Landsaw is our throwing coach for both teams, and does a tremendous job with his availability and his expertise and knowledge are fantastic."

As for the other field events, numerous spots are open for runners to come over and work on another event. "We had some guys leave, so it's a great way to get more points as a team during an event, but also have guys build different skill sets.

Coach Dundas has been an assistant with the football team, and when approached with the track program, saw it as a new challenge. "There are skills that crossover in both sports,

and really it can benefit both teams to have players from multiple sports improve through track and field. It up the competition level, and can improve athleticism as well"

When asked what about the coaching aspect, Coach Dundas was reflective and tied in the teaching experience. "Teaching and coaching really go hand in hand, but I see the real value especially in times now where athletes or even students realize they can accomplish more, and that minor setbacks can't deter them. It's great to see them break through that wall."

Paris track and field hosts three home meets this year including the Tiger Relays and the LIC championship.

Boys tennis welcomes 22 players, new assistant

BY DAN DUNDAS
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Paris Coach Stefan Aydt is currently entering his 11th season as the boys tennis coach. As well, Coach Aydt is entering his 8th season with girls tennis in the fall.

"One of the things I enjoy most about coaching is the friendships and interactions between athletes with each other and their coaches," Aydt said as his team prepare to enter the season. "We have a pretty close-knit group this year, but they're also very competitive, so practices have been fun so far."

Among the additions to the program is a new assistant coach, which will help out with the newly expanding 22 deep roster, an in-

crease from years past.

"We also have added an assistant coach position that Jacob Randolph is filling this year, so it's been great to have some extra help at practice. 15 of our players are returning, so we do have a decent amount of experience but not as much at the varsity level as I'd like. We'll really need some of those guys to step up after losing 4 out of our top 6 to graduation after last season."

Robert Wells is likely the number one at varsity this season after playing number three last season. Other likely varsity players who all picked up some experience last season include Hudson David, Marcus Mitchell, Aidan Creech, and Harris Romero. At the bottom of

the varsity lineup are a lot of returning guys who are all close in skill that could also challenge some of those higher players.

"The majority of our players are new to tennis when they come in as freshmen, so our expectation is for them to continue learning and improving as they go through the program. With only one senior on the roster this year in first-year player Hayden David, we'll really be leaning on our juniors to provide some leadership and help make practice a hardworking and productive atmosphere."

As one of the bigger schools in the conference, Paris will be challenged by Olney, which always produces a top program. "The LIC will be very strong again, as Olney returns 5 state

qualifiers from last season and Newton returns 1. Casey lost no players to graduation, so they are likely to be improved this year as well. We aim to finish in the top half of the conference and the tournaments we play in."

Paris tennis always seems to squeeze one person into the vast pool for state finals, whether it is boys or girls teams. It's the draw that usually determines where the players get sent. "We always aim to qualify at least one entry for state, but that will also be a challenge if we return to the Danville Sectional again this year along with Champaign Centennial, featuring former state singles champion Max Braun, and Champaign Central who return a pair of all-staters.

2023 Lady Tiger track team largest in several years

BY DAN DUNDAS
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The Paris girls track team is gearing up for another spring season led by fourth year Coach Taylor Birchfield.

She brings experience as a former athlete at Casey-Westfield High School, and as well as coaching basketball and teams camps down in the area.

One thing she has learned is that striving for improvement is important in athletics in later on in life. "My main expectation for my athletes this season is to be dedicated each and every day to bettering themselves.

We aim for a PR each meet, even if it's 1 inch, or half a second faster. Small improvements lead to big improvements. I want the girls to take pride in what they do, work hard, and success will find them."

The track roster has begun to slowly fill up, after be down in numbers like many other activities in recent years.

The roster of 22 has eight shotput and discus throwers, five long distance runners, two hurdlers and seven sprinters, with the overall strength lying in the deep throwing group.

"Trinity Kamplain, a returner in shot put,

just recently PR'ed at the EIU Indoor Championships, placing 10th. I believe she will be close to the top of the conference all year long. Sammy Milam is another returning thrower that finds success in Discus each year. I look forward to seeing her strides she will make in her junior season."

Quality is at the top of the sprinter category, as Vivian Moore enters her junior year, with her eye on breaking the 100m, 200m and pole vault school records. Moore placed in the top 15 out of nearly 40 runners at the EIU indoor meet as well.

"We have brought in several new long

distance runners that I believe will assist us greatly in meets, as we did not have many long distance runners last season," she said. Especially in a track and field sport, a lot of times it comes down to the individual athlete and what they can accomplish.

"My goals for the 2023 season are for all of my athletes to reach their own goals in terms of person bests," Birchfield concluded. "I would love for us to place high at the LIC meet as well as sectionals. I know we've got a great group of hard working and talented girls and I can't wait to see where this season takes them."

Lady Tiger softball heavy on experience

BY JEFF CHAMBERS
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Some high school softball coaches would look at losing just two seniors to graduation as a win-lose proposition — and fifth-year Paris Lady Tiger softball coach Jeremy Clodfelder finds himself in this predicament.

On one hand, there are just two spots that need to be filled. On the other hand, one of those players — Karley Moore — left as the all-time winningest pitcher in school history.

The other Lady Tiger batted leadoff, played centerfield and led the team in on-base percentage, steals, hits, runs and doubles — Kendall Mathews. She was also second in batting average (.389) and home runs with three. Both of these young women are playing at the next level and Clodfelder acknowledges each will be tough to replace.

But Clodfelder looks at replacing them as something challenging. “We are really excited about another year of Paris Lady Tiger softball,” Clodfelder said. “Coming off of last year’s fourth-straight regional title game appearance and a 16-win season — with five losses coming by one run — we are hoping to chase the 20-win mark and another shot at a regional championship.”

The Lady Tigers are heavy on experience this season with six season entering their final year wearing the orange and black.

Seniors Becca Minor, Kaitlyn Coombes, Caradan Hoffman, Emma Kemper, Jayden Bishop and Zoe Sanders will pretty much take care of two-thirds of the Paris lineup every game. “All of these ladies have played extensively for us,” said Clodfelder.

Minor led the team in hitting with a .395 batting average with five home runs. Hoffman led the squad with 26 runs batted in and also slugged three home runs. Bishop batted .309 and drove in 16 runs with Coombes



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

The Paris Lady Tigers open their 2023 softball season, traveling to Tri-County to take on the Titans. Coach Jeremy Clodfelder’s team includes six returning seniors from a team finished with a 16-win season. Working this week at the PHS softball field are, from left, Kaitlyn Coombes, Kilee Edwards and Peighton Smith.

swiping seven bases and scoring 14 times.

Freshmen Kensley Cox and Kilee Edwards will also be in the mix for a starting spot along with sophomores Hailey Yantis, Emma Sanders, Carlee Longest and Cloe Thompson. Juniors Gracie Dyer and Jaidyn Simpson will also see playing time this year.

A pair of underclasswomen will be getting Clodfelder’s nod to the circle this season. i

Sophomore Peighton Smith and freshman Bella Moreschi will share the bulk of the innings on the mound for Clodfelder.

A busy week awaits the Lady Tigers as they open at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday against Tri-County and their second year Coach Scott Dosch. They host Teutopolis at 4 p.m. Thursday.

On Saturday, they will participate in the Effingham St. Anthony Round Robin along with Okaw Valley. Game times have yet to be determined for those games.



Prairie Press File Photo

Becca Minor, the team’s leading hitter, returns for the Lady Tigers.

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