

New coach to guide experienced Cats



Louisburg senior Austin Henderson is one of several returning starters from last season's Wildcat team that finished with 10 wins. Henderson will be one of seven seniors on the roster when the Wildcats open their season Thursday at home against Paola.

Sometimes in baseball, talent and experience can take you a long way and that is what Louisburg is hoping for this season.

The Wildcats finished with 10 wins last year – which more than doubled their total from the prior season – and have a big chunk of that same team back for another shot at it this season.

There will be one noticeable difference on the Louisburg bench.

Long-time coach Jeff Lohse, who resigned last May after 17 years, handed the reins off to assistant Joel McGhee, who has spent the last few years as the Wildcat junior varsity coach. McGhee also brings a new staff with him in Robert Ebenstein and Andy Wright.

McGhee has liked what he has seen out of his team so far and the transition has been a smooth one for him.

“Practices have been going well,” McGhee said. “We’ve been packing in a significant amount of work these first few weeks. The guys have done a great job adjusting to some of the changes that have been made. We’ve been keeping them very active and increased some of our offensive and defensive work in order to aid the players in their development. Many of the guys put in significant time in the weight room and participating in other sports which will be beneficial.

“It definitely helps to have been on the staff for the past few years. Being familiar with the players and not having to deal with ‘new-guy-itis’ has allowed things to flow a bit easier. Having coached a majority of the guys for at least a year on JV created familiarity with expectations and approach to the game. We haven’t changed too many things, but have made minor adjustments to what Lohse built over his years as head coach.”

The Wildcats lost just three seniors off last season’s 10-11 team and they are ready to take a big step forward with a big help from an experienced pitching staff.

Louisburg lost just one starter out of their rotation and looks to be the strength of their team. Senior Colton Smith, juniors Grant Harding and Sam Guetterman, along with sophomore Dalton Stone will all be in the Wildcats’ starting rotation.



Senior Colton Smith returns to help lead the Wildcats after earning all-league honors last season.

Seniors Matt Risenhoover and Cole Kramer will come in and play big roles in relief spots.

"It is great to have a number of guys that can throw strikes consistently," McGhee said. "Everyone stays engaged throughout the game when strikes are thrown. Putting the ball over the plate and letting the defense work is something these guys are willing to do.

"Our defensive effort begins with these guys. Offering up a tempting buffet to hitters is key, so the defense can go and 'grub' as the guys have been putting it, on groundballs and fly balls. By filling up the zone, our staff puts us in positions to win games. We don't have to strikeout all of them, but we've got to make it enticing and minimize mistakes made on the mound."

As far the defensive setup goes, the Wildcats will have a familiar setup on the diamond. Senior Alex Dunn returns as the starting catcher, while Smith, a second-team all-league selection a year ago, will play third.

Seniors Cale Schneider and Risenhoover will play up the middle at second base and shortstop, respectively. Fellow senior Austin Henderson, an honorable mention all-league player last year, returns to first base.

Kramer, who was the Wildcats' lone all-league first team selection a season ago, will play centerfield and Harding will play an outfield spot. Blake Ruder and Korbin Hankinson will play the outfield as well.

"With the number of pitchers that we have and the experience behind them we have the ability to mix things up," McGhee said. "It is great to know that regardless of who you have pitching there is a solid defense behind them."

Offensively, Louisburg appears to be just as strong. As the team's leadoff hitter, Kramer hit .394 a season ago. He had a team-high 15 RBIs, six doubles, two triples, a home run and 15 stolen bases.

At third base, Smith finished last season with a .412 average with five doubles, a triple and 13 RBIs. Henderson also provided some pop with a .333 average, six doubles and 10 RBIs.

"Offensively we have a good mixture returning and several that are looking to play a larger role this year," McGhee said. "We have the ability to get on base, move around with contact, speed, or extra base hits. We have a group that is willing to sacrifice an at-bat to put runners in scoring position and to score runs."

Louisburg will try and get its season off to a good start Thursday when it plays host to Paola in a doubleheader. First pitch is set for 4:30 p.m.

2016 LOUISBURG HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL SCHEDULE

Mar. 31			
Paola			4:30
p.m.			
Apr. 7			at Prairie
View			4:30 p.m.
Apr. 9			at Fort Scott
Tournament	TBA		
Apr. 12			at
Eudora			4:30 p.m.
Apr. 19			
Baldwin			4:30 p.m.
Apr. 21			
Osawatomie			4:30 p.m.
Apr. 26			at De
Soto			4:30 p.m.
Apr. 28			at
Chanute			4:30 p.m.
May 3			at
Ottawa			4:30 p.m.
May 9			Spring
Hill			4:30 p.m.