

STRETCHING **ATHLETIC SEASON**



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Junior College athletics get a late start



JEFF BRASEL
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As the nation was divided on collegiate athletic participation, the National Junior College Athletic Association decided it would postpone sports until the spring semester.

Instead of football starting play in the hot part of the summer and cooling down in the fall, the sport will start in cold February and finish with a championship in the warmth of June.

Fall sports were also moved to spring as well. The basketball season was pushed into a time when softball and baseball always began.

Northark traditionally began springs sports as basketball was winding down, but this year they all will be cranked up together.

Basketball has had its number of games reduced from 30 contests a year to 22. The season was technically shortened a month.

Normally, basketball began on Nov. 1 and the postseason was completed in early March and the national tournament was held the third week of March. That equates to spring break for those that worked the event for three years when it was at Northark.

This year, the regular season runs through March and then ends with postseason play in April.

The diamond sports of baseball and softball will have traditional schedules

this year.

Northark's baseball and softball teams will host teams for tournaments or classic type settings in February and March. Several schools will be making their way to Harrison to play in the event.

Things got tougher for the Lady Pioneer softball team. The region went from just two teams participating in the sport to four teams.

Northark's baseball team has to finish the season above .500 against junior colleges to participate in play in Texas with a World Series trip on the line.

The basketball teams were thrown a curve ball in the last two weeks. The Pioneers and Lady Pioneers along with the other teams in Region II had everything lined out nice and neat.

Then the NJCAA decided to change things up some. Arizona was added to the regional tournament.

That boiled down to one school — Pima — who is playing basketball this season.

Arizona has seven teams that normally play basketball each year. However, this year there is Pima.

Even though Arizona is Region 1 and Arkansas and Oklahoma comprise Region II, there is New Mexico and West Texas standing in the way of traveling to the Natural State.

This is not the first time that Arkansas and Arizona have hooked up. Back in the olden days of basketball when Jerry Thomason was at the helm of the Pioneers, his teams were frequent flyers to the Grand Canyon state to play in a tournament there.

Then for a couple of seasons, the Pioneers played Region 5 teams which are the New Mexico and West Texas teams.

Pima gets to jump those two states and Oklahoma to play basketball at Harding University in the Region II Tournament.

This isn't good news for the Arkansas schools. Pima is a top 10 program in men's and women's basketball. It just adds more fire to the tournament.

If you have not been to a Northark basketball game, I invite you to attend one. The level of play is top notch. It is always a good afternoon or evening watching the round ball at Pioneer Pavilion.

Also, the Lady Pioneer softball team is looking solid this season and Eric Osner has his best baseball team at Northark.

North Arkansas College is a great place for athletics.

THANK YOU

Stretching the athletic season is a publication that previews the athletic programs of North Arkansas College. This publication could not be possible without the help of several people.

Brandon Cone was instrumental in organizing the photo shoots of the athletic teams.

A special thanks goes to the Northark coaches that spent so much time answering questions about their teams. We wish Seychelle Mahoney, Eric Osner, Steve Hunter and Bobby Howard the best of luck this season.

Several people at the Daily Times played a special part in conjunction with this magazine. Rodney Beaver walks around with a catcher's mitt to catch all of my mistakes. Sherry Zollo was responsible for designing this publication. Kari Coolidge, Barbara Dean and Sheri Underdown did a great job in securing advertising to make this magazine. Please take a few minutes to thank the sponsors.

There are several other people that have to be thanked. My wonderful wife had to spend time without me as did my grandsons Abram Henry, Atticus Hatcher and Harley Michael. It is always hard to put them on the back burner. My daughters — Lake and Hannah — and my son-in-laws — Dusty and Mark — picked up the slack while I was not playing with the boys.

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Photo Credit

The cover photo was taken by Jeff Brasel on Pioneer Field. The team photos were taken by Jeff Brasel.



Pioneer baseball fielding a strong, deep team

By JEFF BRASEL
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When putting together a puzzle, every piece has an exact placement in the overall finish of the brain teaser.

North Arkansas College's baseball team is not an exact puzzle. The team has many pieces that can fit on the field in many different places. The team has a lot of players that will be able to see the field this season.

The squad has a good balance of pitching, fielding and hitting.

"I think depth will be our strength," said Pioneer coach Eric Osner. "We have a lot of guys that can play. We have multiple guys in all positions.

"I have 16 arms that I trust on the mound," continued the coach when discussing the bright spots of the team. "The top nine or 10 arms are the better ones in the group but the next six or seven are really good and I felt comfortable using them."

The depth of the team can help in many aspects of the upcoming season.

"We can put someone into any position," said Osner. "If any of the guys get in a slump, we have some people that can step in and help. We won't drop off."

As depth is the strength of the team, the same characteristic may be a short coming.

"Depth may be our weakness too," said the coach. "There are a lot of guys that are very similar. It may be difficult to play guys in at the right time. I may overthink it. I have to try to keep guys fresh. I have 22 players that I could put in the box and 16 on the mound."

Osner continued. "It is a deal that I don't know if I have all the kinks worked out. I still don't know who will be our best guy at every position in every situation. I will have to learn which guys will be able to work out of a jam and when I will need to pull some guys off the mound."

The Pioneers have nine players returning along with some transfers.

"We have some that will give us the experience that we need on the field," said the coach of the returning players.

Northark will begin its season on Feb. 6 on Pioneer Field at noon. The team will play six of its first eight games at home.

On Mar. 4, the team will host a tournament at home. It will last for five days.

PIONEER BASEBALL cont' pg 4

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As the team enters the season, Osner expects to play lot of players.

► **CATCHERS**

The coach was happy with the numbers of players that he can use behind the plate.

“We have three guys that we will utilize back there,” he said. “Joe Brown, Arly Brown and Nate Fitzgerald will all help us.”

“Nate (Fitzgerald) is a big left-handed stick that can play,” started the coach. “Joe (Brown) throws is pretty good. He may have the best arm of the three and Arly (Miller) blocks it well back there.

“All three guys can play back there and are pretty beneficial for us,” continued the coach. “If anyone gets banged up, we have the ability to give them some rest.”

► **FIRST BASE**

The two first basemen will both be in the game. Trey Rassenfloss and John Hazelton will be manning the position.

“Trey (Rassenfloss) is a returner that saw time last year,” said the coach. “He has come around offensively. He led us in home runs in the fall. He is a big (6-foot-4), strong kid that can grab anything. He is a really good player.

“John (Hazelton) will be our designated hitter,” continued the coach. “He is a left-handed hitter that is a true freshman. He will be swinging in the middle of the lineup.”

► **SECOND BASE**

Two guys will be seeing second base for Pioneers this season. Anthony Soria and Kelby Coburn are slated to battle for the position.

“Kelby (Coburn) is more offensive for us,” said Osner. “Soria is a true freshman that is very good.”

► **SHORTSTOP**

Todd Girdner is the shortstop for the Pioneers this season.

“He makes all the routine plays,” said Osner. He can play on the run. He can make the throw on the run. He is a true freshman, but he looks like an upperclassman. He can swing it a bit. He should be at the top of the lineup, but we have him in the

seven or eight hole. He will be extremely dangerous down there.”

Sorio will be backing up Girdner at shortstop.

► **THIRD BASE**

The Pioneers will have a third baseman and an utility player to man the hot corner.

“Kinson Michel is very offensive,” started Osner. “He can swing it. He is a two hole type hitter. He does well enough at third. He is also one of our top arms. He will be a staple in the lineup. He can put up good numbers.”

The utility player is Austin Arey.

“He will play a lot,” said the coach. “He can play shortstop or second. He will see most of his time at third. He can put the ball in play.”

► **OUTFIELD**

The Pioneers have several good outfielders, but four are the cream of the crop. Aaron Hogue, Chris Duncan, Crayton Henry and Trey Wiggins can cover the open ground.

“Hogue is an exciting player,” said Osner. “He led the nation in home runs last year. he will be our two or three hole guy. He can run, throw and hit. He checks a lot of boxes.

“Duncan is an infielder that we converted to the outfield,” continued Osner. “He is fast. He has some pop in his bat. He is strong. He is your typical leadoff hitter. He will have a good year.”

The coach commented about the other two players.

“Henry is the lone sophomore on the team,” said the coach. “He has been at Northark since I took over. He is one of those guys that gets it. He draws walks. He has good power. He is a good swinger from the left side. He puts together a lot of good at-bats. He is the old man on the team. Everyone looks up to him.

“Trey (Wiggins) is another infield/outfield guy,” he said. “He is a utility guy. He will see several good at-bats this season. He is a glue guy that you have to have.”

PIONEER BASEBALL ROSTER

NO.	ATHLETE	POSITION	YEAR	HOMETOWN	NO.	ATHLETE	POSITION	YEAR	HOMETOWN
1	Todd Girdner	MIF	Fr.	Har-Ber	22	Carson Sturdefant	UTL/P	Fr.	Seymour, Mo.
2	Austin Arey	INF/P	Fr.	Rowlett, Texas	23	Sammy Casarez	OF	Fr.	Fayetteville
3	Anthony Soria	MIF/P	Fr.	Central, Texas	24	Jacob Koch	RHP	Fr.	Houston, Mo.
4	Josh Calhoon	MIF	Fr.	Republic, Mo.	25	John Hazelton	1B	Fr.	St. Louis, Mo.
5	Kelby Coburn	2B	Fr.	West Columbia, Texas	26	Brandon Overman	OF/RHP	Fr.	Liberal, Mo.
6	Chris Duncan	2B	Fr.	Fulshear, Texas	27	Max Bates	LHP	Fr.	Co. Hickman, Mo.
7	Colby Vavruska	RHP	Fr.	Conway, Mo.	28	Aaron Hogue	OF	Fr.	Clinton
8	Joseph Brown	C	Fr.	Mac. County, Mo.	29	Kinson Michel	INF/P	Fr.	Nixa, Mo.
9	Grant Beaver	UTL/P	Fr.	West Columbia, Texas	30	Draven Zeigler	RHP	Fr.	Ash Grove, Mo.
10	Arly Miller	C	Fr.	Mansfield, Mo.	31	Ryan Leonard	RHP	Fr.	Branson, Mo.
11	Ryan Carlson	RHP	Fr.	Rogers-Heritage	32	Jamal Encarnacion	OF	Fr.	NW HS, Texas
12	Caleb Emmert	C	Fr.	Ft. Smith SS	33	Crayton Henry	OF	Soph.	Mansfield, Mo.
13	Trey Wiggins	MIF	Fr.	Moore, Okla.	34	Trey Rassenfloss	1B	Fr.	Fort Osage, Mo.
14	Eric Helms	UTL	Fr.	Seymour, Mo.	36	Wyatt Ridinger	LHP	Fr.	Branson, Mo.
15	Gavin Bleything	RHP	Fr.	Co. Hickman, Mo.	38	Chance Mobley	OF	Fr.	Branson, Mo.
16	Garrett Wirsig	LHP	Fr.	Deepwater, Mo.	—	Nate Fitzgerald	C	Fr.	Dallas, Texas
17	Cameron Pratt	INF/P	Fr.	Anderson, Ind.	—	Brayden Ferrie	RHP	Fr.	Rolette, Texas
18	Ty Anderson	LHP	Fr.	Maumelle	RS	Andrew Brown	RHP	Fr.	Spring Hill, Kan.
19	Darrien Woods	RHP	Fr.	Forsyth, Mo.	RS	Will Camplain	OF	Fr.	Cabot
20	Brady Stevenson	C/OF	Fr.	Spring Hill, Kan.	RS	Trayson Hicks	INF/P	Fr.	Jasper
21	Colton Baur	RHP	Fr.	Hollister, Mo.					

► PITCHERS

When it comes to pitching, the Pioneers have enough arms to keep a solid rotation even if injuries occur.

"We have a lot of good arms," said the coach. "We are really deep on the mound."

Gavin Bleything, Garret Wirsig, Draven Zeigler, Max Bates, Carson Sturdefant, Soria, Ryan Carlson and Ty Anderson are the lead arms.

Bleything is a returning pitcher that is a low 80s right-hander thrower. He has three pitches and "is a great kid," said the coach. "He has committed to Columbia College in Missouri."

Wirsig is a big left-handed pitcher. "He has three pitches and is a low-to-mid 80s," started the coach. "He is a first-year guy that will be expected to contribute big things."

Zeigler can bring the heat.

"He sits at 90-92, but he can go as high as 95," said Osner. "He has a good slider, good change up. He has gotten some interest from pro scouts. He has the stuff. He is 6-4, 200. He is tough. He is going to be a big arm for us. He has a chance to win us a lot of ballgames."

The coach has the option of keeping batters off balance with Bates.

"He is a soft lefty," said Osner. "He doesn't throw hard. He just keeps batters off balance. He will see some starts. He will be a long relief type guy."

Sturdefant will be expected to be a long relief pitcher for the Pioneers.

"He may get some starts. He is a big kid that can pitch," said Osner. "He had the lowest ERA on the team in the fall."

Infielder Soria will make his way to the bump as well.

"He is a right-handed pitcher with a good breaking ball," started the coach. "He is a mid 80s guy. He will see a lot of late inning work. He is a closer-type pitcher. He is a good guy in the back of the bullpen."

Carlson is a returning player for the Pioneers. "He is a closer-type pitcher," stated the coach. "He is a good closer for us."

Anderson is a south paw.

"Anderson is our top lefty out of the pen," said the coach. "He is a returner for us. He is an 80s guy that will see a lot of time."

The coach pointed to several other players that will be able to contribute for the squad on the bump this season.

Colton Baur, Brayden Ferrie, Ryan Leonard, Brandon Overman, Wyatt Ridinger and Darrien Woods are all expected to see time to the Pioneers this season.

The Pioneers are the only Division III baseball team in Region II which includes Oklahoma and Arkansas junior colleges.

To make the district playoffs, the team has to finish the season with a .500 record against junior college baseball teams.

Two other Arkansas junior colleges have added baseball to the agenda. National

Park College of Hot Springs and Rich Mountain are both field diamond squads.

As the Pioneers enter the season, there is one attribute that the coach likes about his team.

"The guys get along really well," he said. "We are going to have a really good year."

Osner is assisted by Karsten Leibold with coaching responsibilities.

The Northark baseball team members include: Ty Anderson, Maumelle; Austin Arey, Rowlett, Texas; Max Bates, Hickman, Mo.; Colton Baur, Hollister, Mo.; Grant Beaver, West Columbia, Texas; Gavin Bleything, Hickman, Mo.; Andrew Brown, Spring Hill, Kan.; Joe Brown, MacDonald Co., Mo.; Josh Calhoun, Republic, Mo.; Will Camplain, Cabot; Ryan Carlson, Rogers Heritage; Sammy Casarez, Fayetteville; Kelby Coburn, West Columbia, Texas; Chris Duncan, Fulshear, Texas; Caleb Emmert, Fort Smith Southside; Jamal Encarnacion, Northwest, Texas; Brayden Ferrie, Rolette, Texas; Nate Fitzgerald, Dallas, Texas; Todd Girdner, Harber; John Hazelton, St. Louis; Eric Helms, Seymour, Mo.; Crayton Henry Mansfield, Mo.; Trayson Hicks, Jasper; Aaron Hogue, Clinton; Jacob Koch, Houston, Mo.; Ryan Leonard, Branson, Mo.; Kinson Michel, Nixa, Mo.; Arly Miller, Mansfield, Mo.; Chance Mobley, Branson, Mo.; Brandon Overman, Liberal, Mo.; Cameron Pratt, Anderson, Ind.; Trey Rassenfoss, Fort Osage, Mo.; Wyatt Ridinger, Branson, Mo.; Anthony Soria, Central, Texas; Brady Stevenson, Spring Hill, Kan.; Carson Sturdefant, Seymour, Mo.; Colby Vavruska, Conway, Mo.; Trey Wiggins, Moore, Okla.; Garrett Wirsig, Deepwater, Mo.; Darrien Woods, Forsyth, Mo; and Draven Zeigler, Ash Grove, Mo.

The team is coached by Eric Osner and Karsten Leibold is the assistant coach.

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Pioneers blending a deep roster of talent

By JEFF BRASEL
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After a year of recruiting, coaches use the spring to finalize the roster for the next basketball season.

That is the case for Steve Hunter and the North Arkansas College Pioneers.

However, this season Hunter was unable to bring players into Pioneer Pavilion to see their talents and allow the students to view the campus in person.

Last spring Hunter and his assistant coach Jordan Hunter, turned to videos to finalize the Pioneer schedule.

“You never know when you go off of videos,” said the veteran coach. “They are highlight videos and that is what you get — the kids highlights. You don’t get an entire look at their game.”

The players that Hunter landed this year via the video are some that will work into the plans of the team.

“We are pleased with the ones that we got,” he said. “They have blended in very well.”

Blending is always a tough job at a two-year college where students are only there for a very short time.

“Our team gets along,” he said. “They are developing some continuity.”

The Pioneers have five returning players and started the season with an additional 12.

“We started with 17,” the coach said. “We had two hurt and two didn’t come back second semester. We could have brought some players in at Christmas, but we didn’t see anyone that could have really helped us.”

Over the last few seasons the Pioneers have lacked depth inside. This season Northark has some bigs.

“We have five big ones and they all will see the floor,” said Hunter.

The Pioneers have a good blend of position players.

“There are eight guards,” stated the coach. “We have good size. We are not as mobile as we like to be.”

One of the attributes of the team is one that can put points on the board.

“We do shoot it very well,” stated the coach. “We can put some points up at times.”

This season, as with all National Junior College Athletic Association teams, the schedule

PIONEER BASKETBALL cont' pg 7

PIONEER BASKETBALL ROSTER

NO.	ATHLETE	POSITION	HEIGHT	YEAR	HOMETOWN
0	Dontae Taylor	G	6-0	Fr.	Springfield, Mo.
1	Elliott Brooks	G	6-1	Soph.	Memphis, Tenn.
2	Nate Schwartz	G	6-2	Fr.	Columbia, Mo.
3	Hayden Thomas	G	6-3	Soph.	Qulin, Mo.
4	Nick King	G	6-1	Fr.	Port Arthur, Texas
5	Kaleb Woldeyes	F/C	6-8	Fr.	London, UK
10	Cyrus Alexander	F	6-5	Soph.	St. Louis, Mo.
11	Noah Gordon	G/F	6-3	Fr.	Fort Smith
14	Jacob Grady	G	6-2	Fr.	Bradford
23	Chris Hill	G/F	6-3	Fr.	St. Louis, Mo.
24	Trent Lippoldt	F/C	6-7	Soph.	Doniphan, Mo.
33	Seth Beussink	F/C	6-9	Soph.	Jackson, Mo.
42	Kyrin Hines	F/C	6-8	Fr.	Riverdale, Md.
RS	Uziel Muteba	G	6-2	Fr.	Germantown, Md.
RS	Tanner Oetting	G	6-1	Soph.	Springfield, Mo.
Head Coach: Steve Hunter (7th season)					Athletic Director: Bobby Howard
Assistant Coach: Jordan Hunter (7th season)					Manager: Bryan Rosson

PIONEER BASKETBALL cont' from pg 6

has been cut because of COVID-19. The Pioneers have fewer games.

"Our goal every year is 20 wins," said the coach. "That is going to be difficult when you can only schedule about that many games."

With a reduction in time to play all games, Northark will be a busy place.

"We have six weeks where we have three games a week," stated Hunter. "If we lose a game because of COVID, it will be hard to make it up because we are playing all the time."

The Pioneers started the season believing that the squad would be competing against Region II schools and then playing against Missouri's region in district play.

That has changed. Due to some colleges not participating in sports this season because of the virus, the Arizona region has been added to Region II.

Arkansas' junior college conference has six teams playing this season. Northark, which has been playing basketball for more than 40 years, Arkansas State University, Mid-South (West Memphis), National Park College (Hot Springs), Southern Arkansas University Tech (Camden) and University of Arkansas, Cossatot (DeQueen) are all back this year. South Arkansas Community College of El Dorado has begun play this year.

Being added to the regional tournament that will be played at Harding University is Pima Community College of Pima, Ariz.

Going into the season, the Pioneers are a youthful bunch. He feels that the team will learn what it takes to put wins on the board.

"We are pretty young," said the coach. "We have competed in scrimmage matches. We have shown glimpses of playing well."

The five returning players for Northark are Trent Lippoldt; Seth Beussink; Elliott Brooks; Tanner Oetting; and Nick King.

Lippoldt was a starter last season for the Pioneers. The 6-foot-7 sophomore is from Doniphan, Mo.

"He is someone that we are counting on," said Hunter. "He logged a lot of minutes last year."

Jackson, Mo. native Beussink is a hybrid player for the Pioneers. He is 6-9.

"He is long," said the coach. "He can shoot it from anywhere. He shot 40 percent from the outside last year."

Springfield, Mo. resident Tanner Oetting is a 6-1 guard that will be redshirting this season.

"He had the most experience guard-wise," said the coach. "He had shoulder surgery and he will be out for the season."

Brooks is a 6-1 guard from Memphis, Tenn. He was in action for the Pioneers last season and has caught the eye of the coach this year.

"He played sparingly last year," started Hunter. "He is doing very well this year. He has eliminated his turnovers. He is looking pretty good."

King is from Port Arthur, Texas and is a 6-1 redshirt freshman.

"He has hung in there and got better," said the coach. "He is strong and athletic. He

can defend well. He will be a backup point guard this year."

The Pioneers have three transfers that will help the squad a lot this year. Hayden Thomas was at Rind Lake last season. Cyrus Alexander was at William Penn College last season and Kaleb Woldeyes was at Davis & Elkins College.

The trio will provide experience for the Pioneers.

Thomas is a 6-3 guard from Quin, Mo.

"His numbers were identical to what Kenny Chambers had for us last year," said the coach. "He is a pure shooter. Shooting is what he does. The team has figured out that they need to find him. He is also a great student and a great person."

Alexander is a 6-5 guard from St. Louis, Mo.

"He is crafty around the basket," stated Hunter. "He will bring us some athleticism in the paint. He is also a pretty good student."

Woldeyes adds an international flare to the Pioneer lineup. He is a 6-8 forward from London, England.

"He has a lot of energy," stated the coach. "He is a great kid. We went on what we saw on film. He still has a ways to go, but he offers some height."

The last big is Kyrin Hines of Riverdale, Md. He is 6-8.

"He is a big boy with a big body," Hunter said. "He already has some interest. He has a 3.1 GPA. If we have him in the game, we could go with bookends."

The freshman guards are a bright spot for the Pioneers this season. Nate Schwartze, Dontae Taylor, Chris Hill, Jacob Grady and Noah Gordon round out the quintet.

"I really like our freshmen guards," said Hunter. "They are pretty good."

A highly recruited player from St. Louis area is Hill, who is a 6-3 guard.

"He was a marquee signing," started Hunter. "He was a top 5 scorer in St. Louis last year. He was highly recruited. He was a qualifier, so he didn't have to go juco. He is a very good player."

Taylor is a 6-0 guard from Springfield, Mo.

"He was a starting point guard for four years," said Hunter. "He played in the Lendel Thomas when he was a sophomore. He is a very good natural point guard."

Schwartze is from Columbia, Mo. and is a 6-2 guard.

"He is one of the first to sign," said the coach. "He is a good shooter and good passer. He shoots it well and has great court vision. He is pretty solid."

Two Arkansas products — Gordon and Grady — add excitement to the squad.

Grady is a 6-2 guard from Bradford.

"He has turned the corner," stated the coach. "He is going to be ready to play some minutes. He sees the floor well and he passes the ball well."

Gordon is a 6-3 guard from Fort Smith Northside.

"He is a solid rebounder," stated the coach. "He can pick up some points off of offensive rebounds. He also shoots the ball well."

As the Pioneers begin the season, the team has the depth to compete in the vigorous schedule that has been set before them this season.

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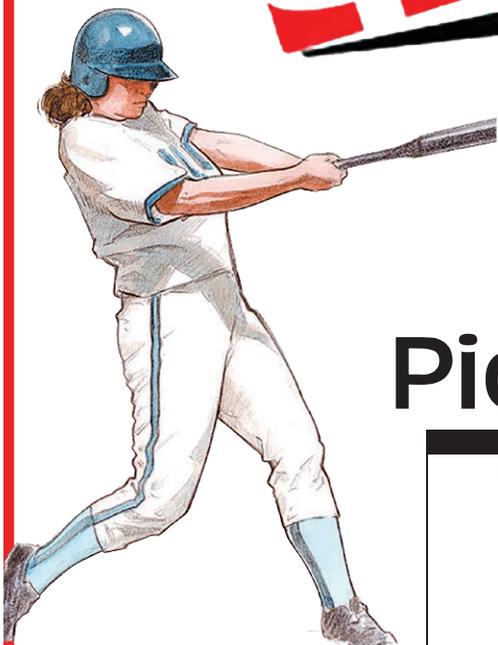
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Lady Pioneers bring back a lot of experience

By JEFF BRASEL
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The Lady Pioneers of North Arkansas College are ready to continue playing. It has been a roller coaster ride with the restrictions that athletic teams have had to face due to COVID-19.

“It is hard to keep them focused,” said North Arkansas College Lady Pioneer coach Bobby Howard. “We were not able to practice and then we practice for two months. Then we took six weeks off and now we have finally started our season.”

Northark comes back with three starters and another player that saw valuable minutes all season long. The team finished 22-6 last season and earned a trip to the national tournament.

However, due to COVID-19 issues last spring, the event was canceled and the Lady Pioneers didn’t get a chance to showcase their wares on a national level.

“This is a hardworking team,” said Howard about his squad. “They like to win and that goes a long way.”

When asked what the strength of the team was, Howard found a lot of characteristics that described his team.

“Their knowledge of the game,” was the first attribute that he listed. “They all come from winning programs and they know how to win.”

“We had a lot of success last year and they bought into the program,” continued Howard. “They have a chip on their shoulder from not getting to go to the national tournament last year.”

While the Lady Pioneers have a lot of strengths, the team does have a glaring weakness.

“Size,” stated the coach. “We are not very big. We have several medium size and several small ones. We don’t rebound well. We have given up several offensive rebounds in scrimmages this year. We have to change our mindset to get rebounds offensively and defensively.”

The Lady Pioneers are expected to be one of the best teams in Region II. However, in the third week of January, the National Junior College Athletic Association changed regional competition for the Lady Pioneers and other members of the Arkansas conference.

“Arizona got added to our regional tournament,” said Howard. “Due to COVID, a lot of the

Arizona schools are not playing. They only have one school that is playing and that is Pima.”

Pima Community College has been to the national tournament three seasons in a row which included visiting Pioneer Pavilion when the national event was held there.

“Pima is ranked in the top 10 nationally,” said Howard. “That makes our region really strong.”

There are five teams from Arkansas that are eligible to play in the regional tournament this year. Joining Northark is Southern Arkansas University Tech (Camden); Arkansas State University — Mid-South (West Memphis); University of Arkansas, Cossatot (DeQueen); and National Park College (Hot Springs).

LADY PIONEER BASKETBALL cont’ pg 11

LADY PIONEER BASKETBALL ROSTER

NO.	ATHLETE	POSITION	YEAR	HEIGHT	HOMETOWN
0	Kendall Atchison	F	Fr.	5-11	Omaha
1	Aniah Johnson	G	Fr.	5-6	St. Louis, Mo.
3	Savanna Collins	G	Soph.	5-8	Springdale
10	Ajhane Simpson	G	Fr.	5-6	Monticello
11	Madison Moore	G	Soph.	5-5	Valley Springs
12	Emma Kelly	F	Fr.	5-8	Jonesboro
13	Zoie McGhee	F	Fr.	5-9	Alma
15	Kenzie Parker	F	Fr.	5-8	Harrison
20	Kelcee Hopper	P	Soph.	6-1	Berryville
21	Cambre McCullough	G	Soph.	5-2	Ashdown
22	Abby Dean	F	Soph.	5-7	Alpena
24	Baylea Smith	G	Soph.	5-7	Berryville
32	Kristen Hargrove	F	Fr.	5-10	Marshall

Head Coach: Bobby Howard
Athletic Director: Bobby Howard

Manager: Anne Mitchell
Mascot: Lady Pioneers

LADY PIONEER BASKETBALL cont' from pg 10

South Arkansas Community College of El Dorado added a program this season, but the college has to serve a probational period before being allowed to compete in the postseason.

The regional tournament will be held in Searcy at Harding University and it will include the Arkansas schools and Pima. The national tournament will be in Port Huron, Mich.

All athletes that play this season will still have another year of eligibility left.

"This year doesn't count toward eligibility," said Howard. "We don't know how many games that we can play. We don't know who will be quarantined during the season."

Heading into the season, colleges will be under heavy protocols for keeping everyone safe.

"We have major protocols that we have to follow during travel and during games," he said.

"We have temperature checks. We do a lot of things to make sure we are safe."

Pioneer Pavilion will allow fans, but Southark is not allowing fans to its games. Most of the Arkansas schools are allowing attendance.

As the players take the court this season, Howard has his starting lineup determined early. Kelcee Hopper, Savanna Collins, Madison Moore, Baylea Smith and Kenzie Parker will all have their names called at the beginning of the game.

Hopper is a 6-foot-1 post player from Berryville.

"She has become more athletic," said Howard of the sophomore. "She is tough inside. He is hard nosed and really likes to win.

Collins is a 5-8 guard from Springdale Har-Ber.

"She has committed to Drury, which is a top 5 Division II program," said the coach. "She can do it all. She can shoot, pass, run our offense and defend."

Moore is a 5-5 guard from Valley Springs.

"She is a solid floor general for us," said the coach. "She doesn't score a lot, but she gets people to the right places."

Smith of Berryville has worked her way into the lineup. She is a 5-7 guard.

"She is a smart player that is very solid and has been scoring more," said Howard. "I expect more out of her every game."

Cracking the lineup with the sophomores is Harrison freshman Parker. Parker is a 5-8 hybrid

player.

"She has been impressive in practice," stated the coach. "We expect good things out of her."

Howard went on to say that we are going to play a lot of players this year. One of the first players off the bench will be third-year player Cambre McCullough of Ashdown. She is a 5-2 guard.

"She will be valuable," stated Howard about McCullough. "She knows what is expected when she is on the court. She set out last year with leg problems. She played a lot as a freshman."

Another freshman that will see a lot of time on the court is Zoie McGhee. McGhee is a 5-9 forward from Alma.

"She is a middle-sized longer player that has played well early," stated the coach. "She is a smart player that knows how to play."

A sophomore logged some time last year and will see even more time this season. Abby Dean is ready for the new challenge that faces her. She is 5-7 and is from Alpena.

"She got some minutes last year, and is looking real good this fall," said the coach.

Omaha's Kendall Atchison is a 5-11 freshman.

"She is long and athletic," said Howard. "Once she gets the hang of the game, I expect some good minutes out of her."

Emma Kelly of Jonesboro is another freshman that will play quality minutes. She is 5-8.

"She is adjusting to the game," said the coach. "She is a solid good player."

There is a trio of freshmen that are improving. Aniah Johnson (5-6) of St. Louis, Mo.; Ajhane Simpson (5-6) of Monticello; and Kristen Hargrove (5-10) of Marshall are "adjusting to the game and getting better every day."

Howard has a key to determining the success of the team this year.

"The sooner the freshmen get it, the better we will be," he said. "It usually takes a half of a semester to improve, but we don't have that this year. We will have to improve quickly.

As the Lady Pioneers take the court this season, the team will be striving to continue the success of postseason play. This season's players should keep the proud tradition of Lady Pioneer basketball rolling.

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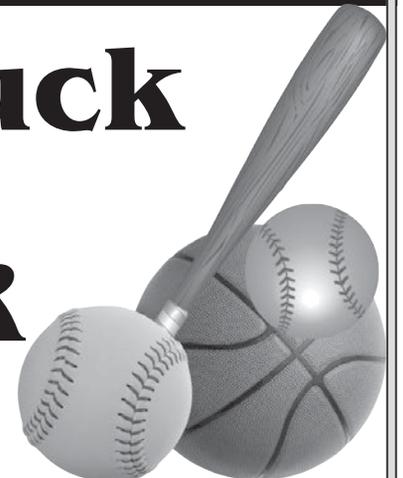


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Three sophomores captain young Lady Pioneers squad

By RODNEY BEAVER
 rodneyb@harrisdaily.com

For the North Arkansas College Lady Pioneers softball team, its biggest weakness for the upcoming season may also be its biggest strength.

“Numbers. Our numbers are low,” said Northark head softball coach Seychelle Mahoney when asked about the biggest weakness of the team prior to the approaching season. “When you lose eight in a semester’s time, that’s hard to swallow. This should be a team of 19. We have four with college innings. Even with 11, just four kids with knowledge of the college game is a setback.”

However, Mahoney didn’t use that rationale as an excuse. In fact, the coach looked at the situation as a positive challenge that has been all too familiar during her 20 years of coaching in the realm of college athletics and 16th at Northark.

“Unity,” the coach exclaimed when asked what was the team’s biggest strength. “Yes, we have very small numbers. We lost eight players from August to January. That hurts as a team, and as a coach. However, some of my best teams have been under 12. It’s not about how many you have, but how they play together.”

Minus the 15 games that were canceled last year due to COVID-19, three players have already logged time together during the 21 games that the Lady Pioneers were able to complete before the cancellations.

Chole Bowen of Kickapoo, Mo., Bellanne Johnson of Branson, Mo. and Maddy Frenzel out of Hollister, Mo. all return to the team as the lone sophomores. The trio will assume roles as the leaders and captains of the team. The coach will be relying on them throughout the course of the season to lead the Lady Pioneers on the field.

“We’ll lean on them until the fencepost breaks,” said Mahoney of her veterans.

Bowen was the cleanup hitter last season and will bring valuable assets to the team.

“She has loads of experience at her corner position,” noted the skipper of her returning infielder. “Chole comes from an outstanding high school program at Kickapoo. She possesses great hands and good solid feet off the bat.”

Johnson will be visiting the plate early in the lineup.

“Bellanne has plenty of travel ball and high school experience,” said the coach. “She reads the middle of the field very well and her bat is solid. She led our team in hitting last season in two categories.”

Frenzel rounds out the list of captains and will be an effective voice in both the dugout and on the field.

LADY PIONEER SOFTBALL cont’ pg 13

LADY PIONEER SOFTBALL ROSTER

<u>ATHLETE</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>POSITION</u>	<u>HOMETOWN</u>
Chole Bowen	Soph.	IF	Kickapoo, Mo.
Bellanne Johnson	Soph.	IF	Branson, Mo.
Maddy Frenzel	Soph.	OF	Hollister, Mo.
Emily Sanders	Fr.	IF	Russellville
Jodie Small	Fr.	P/IF	Dover
Paige Leithead	Fr.	P/IF	Rogersville, Mo.
Emily Admire	Fr.	P/IF	Kickapoo, Mo.
Ester Martinez	Fr.	UT	Russellville
Geneva Rust	Fr.	C/UT	Greenland
Gracie Smith	Fr.	OF	Little Rock
Madison Box	Fr.	C/UT	Blue Eye, Mo.

LADY PIONEER SOFTBALL cont' from pg 12

"Maddy is a student-athlete who has everyone beat in spirit," Mahoney reflected on her final sophomore. "She is never down on herself. She's always upbeat and cheering on all her teammates. Maddy plays centerfield for us, but is movable in the outfield."

Emily Admire will be a new face in the pitching circle for the Lady Pioneers and received high praise from the veteran coach.

"This young lady is one of the best pitchers our Northark softball team has ever had," said the coach. "She has seven pitches that move and direct the plate very well. She is a transfer from a highly regarded Crowder Junior College program. She not only pitches, but plays a putout very well. Admire has the most college knowledge with excellent movement and speed."

Paige Leithead is expected to be one of the first pitchers in the circle to begin the year and also contributed at the plate last fall with three homers.

"Paige was a four-time Missouri 4A State Power Lifting Champion," Mahoney said of her three-hole hitter from last season. "To say the least, she's the strongest softball player I've coached. She turned down two Division II offers to play softball. Paige will be used as our No. 1 or No. 2 pitcher. She's an amazing athlete with a solid bat and great movement on her feet."

Emily Sanders will round out the heart of the lineup and is described by the coach as one of Northark's power hitters.

"Our second Emily," Mahoney noted of the Russellville native. "Emily is very strong physically and will impact our hitting lineup. She is our corner putout."

The leadoff hitter will be a freshman outfielder from Pulaski County.

"Gracie Smith is a Little Rock native," said the coach of one of her speedsters. "Small in frame, but she is very fast around the dirt. She led our team in stolen bases in the fall. She'll be asked to move the diamond this season. At 5-foot-3, she'll be catching on top of being a putout."

The third pitcher in the rotation and the lone Lady Pioneer to come out of the bullpen is Jodie Small of Dover.

"She'll round out our pitching rotation while sharing time in the outfield," Mahoney noted of Small. "She's very quiet, but very hard working. Jodie has aggressive movement on pitches and sees the ball off the bat well in the outfield."

Madison Box is a freshman out of Blue Eye, Mo. and will fill several roles on the diamond this season.

"Our No. 2 Maddy," the coach exclaimed about Box. "She is a solid and strong athlete. She was a three-time All-State athlete in high school. She'll be asked to catch many innings this season. Madison is a fun player to watch."

Geneva Rust is another speedster on the team who will play catcher and be used as a utility player.

"She has quick feet and a great attitude," said Mahoney of Rust.

The final utility player on the squad is Ester Martinez of Russellville.

Mahoney noted Martinez as "very strong and moves well to pitch as another role player for this season."

The 11 players that comprise the Lady Pioneers all have one special thing in common according to the coach and all are in search of the same goal.

"All 11 are true softball players," the coach noted of her roster. "They are athletes who play very well together. From August until now, this team has had unity. Much of that is due to that five of these 11 have played travel ball together. The unity they possess attracts the others."

Camaraderie among the group creates a positive atmosphere on and off the field while pushing each other to bring out the best qualities in each other.

"We promote education first and softball second," Mahoney noted of the climate building around her players. "We have a loving atmosphere with no ego first. We promote acceptance, care and love of the game. We laugh and we love while promoting loyalty, respect and trust."

"The goal for our team grade-point average is 3.0," the coach continued about her team. "We have stayed above that for six-straight seasons."

Another team goal according to the coach is to stay "injury free, stay unified and enjoy every day on the dirt."

On January 28, the oneness of the team will be put to the test when the Lady Pioneers begin their regular season schedule on that dirt. University of Arkansas, Rich Mountain Community College in Mena will host a doubleheader with the Northark team. In February, the Lady Pioneers will begin action with conference play on the road against Southern Arkansas University Tech. Non-conference games will fill the schedule until March when divisional games begin.

Region II looks very different this season and includes four teams that the Lady Pioneers will be competing against this season for a ticket further in the postseason.

SAU-Tech in Camden; Carl Albert State College in Poteau, Okla.; Murray State in Tishomingo, Okla.; and National Park College in Hot Springs along with North Arkansas College fill the teams in the region. Those teams will compete for a bid to the district tournament which the Lady Pioneers last won in 2009.

"All of them are very high quality," Mahoney noted of the competition. "I'd say Murray State and SAU-Tech will be our toughest opponents. It's the first time in my history at Northark where we have had a five-team conference. It's great to see softball interest in Arkansas. It speaks volume for our young, lady athletes."

Toward the middle of February, the Lady Pioneers will host the February Winter Classic and the Northark coach elaborated about the willingness of teams that will

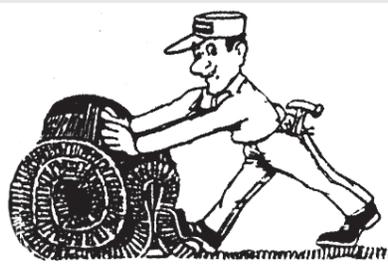
LADY PIONEER SOFTBALL cont' pg 14

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be participating.

"From my time here, we haven't had a problem finding games," the coach noted of the upcoming event. "Many teams have realized 'why go to Florida for a trip when I can come to the beautiful Ozark Mountains'. I have hosted over thirty 'snow bird' schools in my tenure at Northark. I love hosting teams. I'd rather host than travel."

Traveling, however, will be a regular occurrence for the Lady Pioneers in their newly expanded region and Mahoney has already given that pep talk.

"An away game to me is a mindset," she explained. "I've told this team, plan on being three runs in the hole before we ever arrive. Be prepared to fight for 14 innings."

Staying free from injury will be a key ingredient to the success of the team. The pitching and catching end of the roster was the first area the coach pointed to in regard to making a run through the regional tournament.

With only three pitchers on the current roster, Mahoney evaluated her pitching staff as "very solid but youthful," and expects to incorporate more players into the pitching circle.

Leithead will be the No. 1 pitcher on the roster while Emily Admire will take the No. 2 spot. Small is the lone reliever and Mahoney sees "the innings they have to pitch with a 38-game season" being the biggest struggle keeping the pitchers healthy.

When it comes to hitting with 11 players, the coach will have the batting order

figured out quickly.

"It depends on who we are playing, but with only 11 players, it'll be easy to see a lineup," said the coach about determining the pecking order with the bats.

Offensively, the team will still be looking to establish their identity on the diamond.

"It's hard to tell, youth will be our biggest obstacle," said Mahoney when asked how she would describe her team offensively. "We have some who see it well and others who live in their respected heads.

That's why we preach 'don't take yourself too seriously, stay loose and stay poised'"

When the Lady Pioneers take the field on defense, the coach says the starting positions are already established according to the roster. However, she also noted that players will be moving around the field as the games progress.

According to Mahoney, all players including the veterans will be playing "everywhere" when they exit the dugout.

Strong minds and quick bodies will be a strength on defense.

"We read the softball off the bat well," the coach concluded about the defense. "We have good speed around both the outfield and the dirt."

The Lady Pioneers hope to answer more questions about the team as a whole while the schedule rolls along and improve on last season's 5-16 record.

Northark's first home game will be on Feb. 8 when they host a doubleheader with the Lady Mountaineers of Eastern Oklahoma State Community College. The first pitch is set for 1 p.m. on the south campus of the college.



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PIONEER BASEBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME	DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME	DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME
FEBRUARY				MARCH				APRIL			
6	MO Valley Exhibition	Harrison	Noon	4-8	Northark Tournament	Harrison	TBA	6	Eastern Oklahoma	Wilburton, Okla.	1 p.m.
8	Henderson JV	Arkadelphia	Noon	16	Williams Baptist JV	Harrison	Noon	12	Williams Baptist JV	Walnut Ridge	1 p.m.
12	NCMC	Harrison	Noon	17	Arkansas Baptist	Little Rock	Noon	13	Drury JV	Springfield, Mo.	5 p.m.
13	NCMC	Harrison	Noon	24	Arkansas Baptist	Harrison	Noon	20	State Fair	Harrison	1 p.m.
16	State Fair	Sedalia, Mo.	Noon	26	Minnesota West	Worthington, Minn.	TBD	21	Lyon JV	Harrison	1 p.m.
19	Highland CC	Harrison	Noon	27	Minnesota West	Worthington, Minn.	TBD	28	Lyon JV	Batesville	1 p.m.
20	Highland CC	Harrison	1 p.m.	28	Minnesota West	Worthington, Minn.	TBD	MAY			
24	CBC JV	Harrison	Noon	31	Henderson JV	Harrison	1 p.m.	1	Hesston	Hesston, Kan.	1 p.m.
27	Spoon River College	Harrison	Noon					2	Hesston	Hesston, Kan.	1 p.m.
28	Spoon River College	Harrison	Noon								

PIONEER BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME
JANUARY			
16	John Wood CC Scrimmage	Quincy, Ill.	TBA
26	Evangel JV	Harrison	7 p.m.
28	Arkansas Baptist CC	Little Rock	7:30 p.m.
FEBRUARY			
1	Williams Baptist JV	Harrison	7 p.m.
5-6	Mineral Area Classic (MSU-WP/MAC)	Park Hills, Mo.	TBA
8	Evangel JV	Springfield, Mo.	7 p.m.
11	Missouri Baptist JV	St. Louis, Mo.	7 p.m.
13	Arkansas State Mid-South	West Memphis	2 p.m.
16	Three Rivers CC	Harrison	6 p.m.
18	University of AR Cossatot	Lockesburg	7 p.m.
20	Southern AR Tech	Harrison	2 p.m.
23	Central Baptist JV	Harrison	6 p.m.
25	National Park CC	Hot Springs	7 p.m.
27	Southark CC	Harrison	2 p.m.
MARCH			
4	Arkansas Baptist CC	Harrison	7 p.m.
6	Arkansas State Mid-South	Harrison	2 p.m.
9	Link Year Prep	Harrison	6 p.m.
11	U of A Cossatot	Harrison	7 p.m.
13	Southern AR Tech	Camden	2 p.m.
16	Link Year Post Grad	Harrison	6 p.m.
18	National Park CC	Harrison	7 p.m.
20	Southark	El Dorado	2 p.m.
29-Apr 3	Region II Tourney (Harding University)	Searcy	TBA
APRIL			
10	District Championship	TBA	TBA
20-24	NJCAA National Tourney	Danville, Ill.	TBA

LADY PIONEER BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

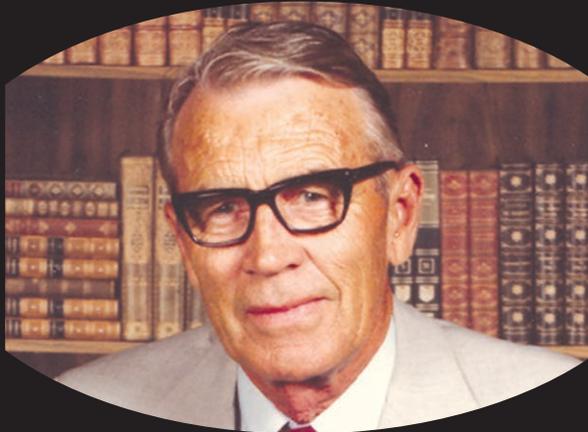
DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME
JANUARY			
22	Crowder	Harrison	6 p.m.
26	Evangel JV	Harrison	5:30 p.m.
28	Arkansas Baptist	Little Rock	5:30 p.m.
FEBRUARY			
1	Williams Baptist JV	Harrison	5 p.m.
3	Crowder	Neosho, Mo.	6 p.m.
5-6	Bryant Stratton Wisc.	Harrison	TBA
8	Evangel JV	Springfield, Mo.	5 p.m.
11	Missouri Baptist JV	St. Louis, Mo.	TBA
13	Mid-South	West Memphis	12 p.m.
18	Cossatot	DeQueen	5:30 p.m.
20	SAU-Tech	Harrison	12 p.m.
25	National Park	Hot Springs	5:30 p.m.
27	Southark	Harrison	12 p.m.
MARCH			
4	Arkansas Baptist	Harrison	5:30 p.m.
6	Mid-South	Harrison	12 p.m.
11	Cossatot	Harrison	5:30 p.m.
13	SAU-Tech	Camden	12 p.m.
18	National Park	Harrison	5:30 p.m.
20	Southark	El Dorado	12 p.m.
23	Metropolitan	Kansas City, Mo.	5 p.m.
29	Regional Tournament	Harding University, Searcy	TBA
APRIL			
10	District Playoff	TBA	TBA
19-24	National Tournament	TBA	TBA

LADY PIONEER SOFTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME
JANUARY			
Jan. 29	U of A Rich Mountain CC	Mena	1 p.m.
FEBRUARY			
6	SAU Tech	Camden	1 p.m.
8	Eastern OK CC	Harrison	1 p.m.
12-13	February Winter Classic	Harrison	TBD
17	Eastern OK CC	Wilburton, Okla.	1 p.m.
19-20	February Winter Classic	Harrison	TBD
26-27	February Winter Classic	Harrison	TBD
MARCH			
3	Carl Albert CC	Harrison	1 p.m.
6	SAU Tech CC	Harrison	1 p.m.
10	U of A Rich Mountain	Harrison	1 p.m.
13	Murray State CC	Harrison	1 p.m.
17	Williams Baptist College JV	Walnut Ridge	1 p.m.
20	Murray State College	Tishomingo, Okla.	12 p.m.
22	National Park College	Harrison	1 p.m.
31	National Park College	Hot Springs	1 p.m.
APRIL			
5	Oklahoma Wesleyan JV	Harrison	2 p.m.
6	Carl Albert CC	Poteau, Okla.	1 p.m.
9	Coahoma, Miss. CC	Clarksville, Miss.	1 p.m.
14	Williams Baptist College JV	Harrison	1 p.m.
19	Lyon College JV	Batesville	1 p.m.
MAY			
7-9	Regional Playoff	Pryor, Okla.	TBA
14-16	District Playoff	Pryor, Okla.	TBA

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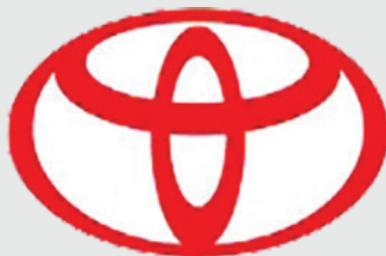
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