

Braham softball ready for the season

by John Wagner

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Braham softball coach Becky Swanson does not wish to ever again lose an entire season as her program did last year.

But one silver lining that she has noticed this spring is her team's renewed energy and enthusiasm for the sport.

"Our girls are ready for the season to go," she said. "In the past, you might have a practice where girls are looking at the clock after an hour, wondering when it's going to end.

"We've had a couple of practices where we finish, and girls say, 'It's already over?' They're excited to be there.

"And when you play three sports, by the spring you can see that the energy may be down a little bit, maybe drained by a long year. This year I've seen energy and enthusiasm I have not seen in years. It makes me want to work even harder



The 2021 Braham softball team features a renewed energy and excitement as it prepares for the coming season. Submitted photo

for these kids."

While there are not a lot of holes on the roster from the team the Bombers fielded two years ago, the holes that do exist are big ones.

"Two years we lost our starting short-

stop and starting first baseman, girls who had started for us for four years," she said. "And last year we lost our starting third baseman, so we're replacing three key infield positions – and I have no idea what to expect."

The good news is that Braham does have plenty of building blocks as a foundation for this season, including the team's two seniors.

"Adelia Pierson has been on the varsity since eighth grade, and she can play multiple positions," Swanson said. "She'll probably be our No. 4 hitter, and she'll be a team leader as one of our two seniors.

"The other senior, Jody Baker, is very versatile, so she'll be competing for playing time at a lot of open spots."

The Bombers' battery, juniors Ella Kuhnke at pitcher and Lacy Cuda at catcher, both saw extensive action as freshmen.

"I'm very excited for this year," Swanson said. "We've got three freshmen whom I have high hopes for, but I don't know what exactly we have because I haven't seen them since they were seventh graders in junior high. They're going to play, and it's exciting to get the chance to see them."

Braham track teams small but mighty

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While the boys and girls track teams at Braham could benefit from a few more youngsters on the roster, the Bomber boys and girls both have several athletes that can score points, especially in big meets.

On the boys side, the Bombers have four senior athletes with varsity experience, a group led by sprinter Jacob Kern. As a sophomore Kern won the 100 (11.81) and 200 (23.54) while anchoring the winning 4x100 relay at the Great River Conference championship and was voted meet MVP.

But Kern is not alone: Ryan Dzibak could offer points in the sprints, while Cody Hansen scored points in the GRC meet in the long jump and triple jump. Shane Lund will anchor the throwing events, while Isaiah Lanrain also is a solid athlete.

"We're a small team, and it will be hard because you can't really compete [for a team title] when you only have four experienced guys," coach Amber Hoffman said. "But our four guys have a chance to be big point-scorers for us."



Senior state qualifier Hannah Cornelius leads a Braham girls track team that has a number of other young sprinters as well as talented athletes able to score points in other events. Submitted photo

Hoffman said she also appreciates the work that her seniors do to help grow the program off the track.

"They do what's right and have lots of integrity," she said. "They work really hard, so I like them as our leaders."

The promising note on the boys side is that Hoffman said the junior high numbers are good, which bodes well for the future.

The girls team also boasts a standout senior

in Hannah Cornelius, a three-time state qualifier who will compete at St. Thomas University starting next season.

"I couldn't be more pleased with her poise and her ability to lead," Hoffman said of Cornelius. "When you have someone of her caliber, there might be a 'fear' factor among younger athletes being around track royalty. But she's so down-to-earth, the girls just follow her lead. ...

"Her legacy in this program will carry on because of the things she is instilling in these younger athletes."

But Cornelius also is not a one-person team; she leads a strong group of sprinters that includes sophomores Julia Kuhnke, Alison Shockman, Ella Doble and junior Jillian Hollencamp.

Senior Sara Piatz should score points in the pole vault, while sophomore McK-



While the Braham boys track team may be small, the Bombers have several athletes who are able to score points in big meets. Submitted photo

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enzie Arnoldi should be a factor in the shot put and discus.

Hoffman also is pleased to add Ray Abraham to her staff as a distance coach. Abraham is the former Cambridge-Isanti standout who in the fall finished his first season as cross-country coach at Braham.

"He's going to be an incredible addition – we're so lucky to have him," Hoffman said of Abraham.