

2026 Spring Sports

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Special Section of the
COUNTY NEWS REVIEW

SPOTLIGHTS

CAMBRIDGE-ISANTI | BRAHAM

Bomber track ready for another strong GRC effort

JOHN WAGNER

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Coach: Amber Hoffman.**Last season:** Boys finished ninth overall at Great River Conference meet; Girls finished fifth overall and first among small schools at GRC meet.**Top returnees:** Boys — Seniors Isaac Eklund, sprints and throws; Dallis Jam-bretz, sprints; Carter Lotz, sprints and jumps. Junior Dominic Nahl, throws. Sophomores Jason Robinson, distance. Freshman Eli Benzen, sprints. Girls — Seniors Bridget Golly, jumps and throws; Makenzie Golly, jumps; Avery Shockman, distance; Emily Davis, pole vault. Sophomores Zoey Claseman, sprints; Payton Mooney, sprints; Nevaeh Fix, hurdles.**Outlook:** For the Bomber girls, the push is for another GRC small-school team title and a step forward in the section meet. With six seniors leading the way, Hoffman thinks those goals are achievable.

“They’ve been through all the trials since seventh grade,” she said. “They’re fresh off their state tournament [in basketball], but so far they look phenomenal.”

“I think they have a lot of confidence as this season begins. They were great leaders before, but I think they’re even better leaders now.”

Claseman won both the 200 meters (27.67) and the 400 (1:02.80) at last year’s



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Braham High School boys and girls track teams.

league meet, while several other sophomores also scored points a year ago.

“We’re hopefully to push for another small-school conference title, but we’re also pushing to beat some of the bigger schools,” Hoffman said. “We’re excited to see what our girls can do.”

On the boys side, the Bombers hope to take a step forward thanks in part to some of the senior leaders, particularly Isaac Eklund.

“Isaac has been with the program since seventh grade, and he’s a great leader,” Hoffman said of Eklund. “He’s taken on [some leadership] with our relays, given them some guidance on zones and exchanges. Sometimes he just takes some of the younger kids [to work with] — it’s kind of like having another coach.”

A large group of younger athletes have helped the team’s numbers, which Hoffman said boosts the team’s depth.

“In the past we’ve had just enough sprinters for our relays,” she said. “But this year we have a little more depth, which gives us some wiggle room, especially on those relays.”

“We have a lot of ninth and tenth graders, so that’s really good for us. We’re watching those younger athletes grow bigger and stronger. We’re excited to see them in the future, but we expect them to help us now as well.”

Braham golf building numbers, excitement

JOHN WAGNER

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Coach: Lauren Kiesz.**Top returnees:** Seniors Ethan Schroeder, Wyatt Eklund, Garrett Lidke.**Outlook:** The good news for the Bombers is that all six members of last year’s starting lineup for the boys return, including the returning league medalist in Schroeder.

“Ethan is really improved a lot since last year, so I think he’s on pace for a really good season,” Kiesz said. “And we also have a ton of freshman boys, and some of them are more than capable of competing for a varsity spot.”

“So there will be a lot of competition for a spot in our lineup in every meet.”

Kiesz said having a deeper roster makes for more competition — and a better

team.

“It’s good because everyone has to take it seriously when they’re competing for a spot,” she said. “And when we have a situation where a player has to miss a meet, that depth helps because we’ll have players who can help us post a good team score. We won’t be so razor-thin.”

The bad news for the girls is that Jenna Burmaster has graduated after making another state appearance, and this year’s roster includes just three middle schoolers.

“We’re in a starting over phase,” Kiesz said for the girls. “Hopefully they stick with it and improve to become varsity players.”

“A few years from now, we hope these girls are able to recruit a couple of friends, and our numbers will be up again.”



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Braham High School boys golf team.

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CAMBRIDGE-ISANTI | BRAHAM

Bomber baseball looks to take step forward

JOHN WAGNER
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Coach: Colton Schusted
Last season: 5-13 overall, 3-11 Great River Conference.

Top returnees: Seniors Carter Beckman, IF-P; Eliyah Belden, SS-P; Magnus Bremer, IF. Juniors Soren Lilly, CF-P; Juan Yslava, P.

Outlook: Having a new coach can be a big adjustment for a team. But while Schusted is in his first year as the head coach, he can hardly be considered “new” since he is a 2018 graduate of the school and was an assistant coach last season.

“I know some of these guys from having come back and coached them in the summer,” Schusted said. “And I was a coach at Ogilvie, so I saw them from the other dugout before I became an assistant.”

“It’s not as if I’m not familiar with

anybody; I have an idea of what the lineup will look like from Day 1. And I know a lot of the families, so I feel I have the support of the community.”

This year the Bombers have just three seniors on the roster.

“We’re young, but we have a lot of guys with experience,” Schusted said. “Last year we competed, and I don’t think there was any game that was out of control. We look to flip some of those one-run games in our favor.”

A big sophomore class also will play a role in the team’s success.

“Matthew Blomdahl is one of the top sophomores in our league, and I think in our state,” Schusted said. “He’ll have an impact on our team as our catcher and probably as our leadoff hitter.”

“We’ll have a deep pitching staff, so I think we’ll give ourselves a chance to win every game. We have set a goal of two



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Braham High School baseball team.

out of every three pitches being a strike, and so far we’ve been able to do that. And that’s with all of our pitches, the off-speed as well as the fastball.

“If we are able to push some runs across

the plate, we’ll have a chance to be successful. So we’ll squeeze out runs in any way we can: bunts, suicide squeeze, everything.”

Braham softball pushes for another league title, state bid

JOHN WAGNER
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Coach: Becky Swanson
Last season: 23-4 overall, 12-2 Great River Conference.

Top returnees: Seniors Jenna Beck, Ace Macauly, Hannah Sward. Juniors Lauren Leniz, Morgan Rysdam. Sophomore Isabelle Shockman.

Outlook: Last year, opponents might have underestimated the Bombers. But after last year’s fourth-place finish in the Class A state tournament, that won’t be the case this season.

“We’re going to get everyone’s best shot,” Swanson said. “Last year people may not have known how good we were going to be, but this year there’s no surprises.”

Still, the expectations for the Bombers have not changed: Their goal this spring is to win the small-school division of

the Great River Conference, then claim the section title and return to state.

Braham will return a large portion of a team that earned valuable experience at the state tournament.

“We lost four outstanding seniors from last year,” Swanson said. “But we have 10 players who lettered last season who are back.”

“We return our entire infield and our all-state catcher in Morgan Rysdam. And two of our outfield positions are players with experience. We need to replace an all-state pitcher and an outfielder.”

Swanson feels she has some young pitchers who can step up and fill that pitching void.

“I’m excited for Avery Johnson, and Morgan Rysdam also will probably pitch some innings for us,” Swanson said. “And we have a couple of eighth and ninth graders



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Braham High School softball team.

who are working their tails off.

“They’ve been working really hard, putting a lot of time in during the off-season to be ready for this season.”

Swanson said she hopes the offense and defense will give those young pitchers a chance to settle in.

“Our bats are going to be a year stronger, a year wiser,” she said. “We’ll see what our defense is going to be, but I anticipate it’s going to be rock-solid.”

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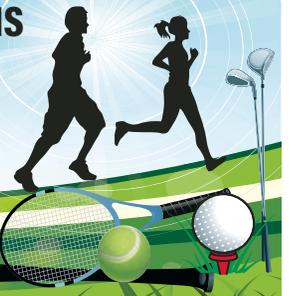
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Cambridge-Isanti boys track sets high bar for success

JOHN WAGNER

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Coach: Kent Viesselman.**Last season:** Won Mississippi 8 Conference title.**Top returnees:** Seniors Cruiz Dissing, sprints and jumps; Hunter Jacobson distance; Wesley Kennedy, pole vault; Calvin Piescher, pole vault and jumps; Jaxon Ziebarth, sprints.**Outlook:** The Bluejackets have a long tradition of track success, including conference titles in five of the last six seasons and a number of high finishes in the Class AAA state meet.

So it's especially notable when Viesselman said this might be one of the school's strongest teams ever.

"If we can keep people healthy, and help our athletes be the best they can be, we can be pretty good," he said.

Last season C-I had a whopping 20 athletes who earned all-conference honors, a number Viesselman hopes to at least match this spring.

"I think this season we have the capability to have an all-conference kid compete in every event," he said. "I have a great assistant coaches, and I think our kids buy into the idea that we want to have a great team, not just great individuals. ..."

"This team is well-connected. Our top people do better because they focus on team. They focus on 'How can I help the team?' and perform better than if they're



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Cambridge-Isanti High School boys track team.

worried about having to perform for themselves."

While there is a galaxy of stars on the roster, the notable all-state returnees include Ziebarth, who earned second in both the 100- and 200-meter dashes, along with Piescher and Kennedy, who in the pole vault placed second and sixth, respectively.

The Bluejackets also return members from the 4x100 and 4x800 relays that earned state berths a year ago, and Jacobson earned all-state laurels in cross country last fall.

At the Minnesota State-Mankato Varsity Showcase last week, C-I placed fourth among 25 teams, and was

just nine points away from second.

Among the top efforts at that meet was a second-place earned by the 4x200 relay of sophomore Knox Andrus, senior Cole Arneson, senior Anders Lillemo and junior Logan Majorowicz, a third from the 4x400 relay of junior Lucashio Larson, junior Landon Bartelt, senior Brody Estrada and Arneson, and a second by the 4x800 relay of Larson, senior Austin Burgess, freshman Trey Gustafson and Jacobson.

Dissing placed fourth in the high jump, while Piescher and Kennedy swept the top two spots in the pole vault.

C-I girls golf to push for league, section honors

JOHN WAGNER

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Coach: Jim Poppen.**Top returnees:** Seniors Amber Grecula, Hannah Westman. Junior Allie Nystrom.**Outlook:** The Bluejackets return a number of players with both talent and experience. Last season Grecula earned All-Mississippi 8 Conference honors and Westman was an honorable mention choice, while Nystrom collected an honorable mention honor in the M8 two years ago.

Three other players with extensive experience include juniors Nora Gustafson, Avaeh Martin and Brynn Jennissen.

"And we have other players who have experience that we can count on, like Brooke Janovich, Ashley Anderson, and Keira Peterson," Poppen said. "And two seniors who came out this year are Kenzie Larson and Lily Rasche."

"From those players, we should be able to field a pretty good top six every week."

As a result, the expectation for this season is for C-I to take a step forward.

"I think we should be competitive in every meet," Poppen said. "Monticello is head-and-shoulders above



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Cambridge-Isanti High School girls golf team.

everyone else in the Mississippi 8, but if we can score like we should, I think we can be among the top teams in the league.

"Our goal needs to be to improve every day, every match. As for sections, if we play to our ability, I think we could bring the whole team back for the second day of the section tournament. And that would be fun."

Poppen did stress that the team is working to improve its game in several areas.

"The hardest thing in golf is to move past a bad shot or a bad hole," he said. "The mental game of golf is always

the most important thing. ..."

"We've talked about putting and the short game as a place to cut a few strokes. And that's something we can work on and improve."

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Bluejacket girls track features deep roster

JOHN WAGNER
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Coach: Michael Galligan.
Last season: Fourth at Mississippi 8 Championship.
Top returnees: Senior Aubrey Wilson, pole vault. Junior Taylor Dybvig, throws; Rilynn Herbst, jumps; Lily Gravem, jumps.
Outlook: Numbers certainly aren't a problem for the Bluejackets, as more than 100 athletes are in the program this spring. Galligan said figuring out how all of the pieces of this puzzle fit together is a pleasant problem.
 "It can be a challenge getting a large number of people who are new to high school track ready for varsity level competition in a very short period of time," he said. "But this group is an incredibly positive and hard working team, and I know they'll give it everything they've got."
 Galligan said among those having an impact on the lineup are three freshmen: sprinter Hannah Kolbeck, middle distance runner Ashley Husbyn, and high jumper Farrah Plocher.
 They joined an experienced group that features Wilson, who has already cleared 10-feet in the pole vault this season; senior Lydia Smisson, who leads the distance pack; and Gravem and Herbst in the long and triple jumps.



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Cambridge-Isanti High School girls track team.

Sophomore Chloe Rist and senior Elaina Bellows will provide the foundation of the team on the sprints and relays.
 "Our strengths this year, based on newcomers and returners, will be spread across all events," Galligan said.
 One setback is the loss of senior Makenna Sjoberg, who finished second in the Mississippi 8 in the 3,200 last year. She suffered an injury during the winter and won't be available this spring.

"Losing Makenna for the season is definitely a very challenging setback," Galligan admitted. "The team will have to work very hard to make up for her absence from the lineup."
 Because of the numbers in the program, Galligan said he enters the season with a positive attitude.
 "As always we hope to achieve a top-three standing in the conference, and top half standing in the Section 7AAA meet," he said.

Young C-I boys golf team to hit the links

JOHN WAGNER
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Coach: Joel Lund.
Top returnees: Juniors Noah Ihrke, Carson Swedeen, Zach Bauer. Freshman Keegan Westman.
Outlook: The Bluejackets lost a number of seniors from last season, and there's only one senior on this year's roster. So yes, C-I will field a young lineup this spring.
 "We have a lot of younger guys who have some varsity experience and played a lot of JV last year," Lund said. "So we're excited for this year and for next year, where we'll have almost everyone returning."
 The one senior is a newcomer to the program, but far from a newcomer to golf as Jacob Bostrom will almost certainly take a number of swings in the varsity lineup. Another leader will be Westman, who as an eighth grader cracked last year's varsity.
 "From what I understand, Jacob is a very good player,



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Cambridge-Isanti High School boys golf team.

so we look forward to having him in our lineup," Lund said. "And Keegan is a very solid player who earned his spot in the varsity lineup last year.

Lund added that a number of the players in this year's lineup spent last summer sharpening their skills in hopes of showing improvement this spring. He said he looks forward to seeing how the lineup shakes out.
 "The nice thing about golf is that you can see what players score in practice, and score in early meets, and those scores dictate who earns a spot in the lineup," he said. "So you could see some guys who float back and forth between varsity and JV."
 "I think the top four guys in the varsity lineup will be pretty consistent, but the final two spots will be up for grabs. We'll see four, five or maybe six different guys in those spots."
 Lund thinks that competition will help the team will improve as the season progresses, as will the camaraderie he has seen in the first weeks.
 "They're eager to get to any golf course that's open and play," he said. "They seem to be a fun group that gets along well."

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C-I baseball ready to step up this season

JOHN WAGNER

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Coach: Mike Bergloff.**Last season:** 9-13, 5-8 Mississippi 8.**Top returnees:** Senior Marcus Hubbard, C-P; Laike Solomonson. Juniors Blake Wotachek, P; Peyton Coplan, CF; Tayton Westphal, SS-3B; Grant Oliver, 1B-C.**Outlook:** While the Bluejackets appear to be young entering this season, the team lost just two full-time starters as well as a couple of role players from a year ago.

“We have guys who have already played 50 games at the varsity level,” Bergloff said. “And a lot of the kids we have coming up are kids who have had a lot of success at lower levels.”

Players such as Hubbard, Coplan and Westphal are entering their third season on the varsity, while underclassmen such

as Wotachek and Oliver saw extensive action last year.

“There’s a lot more ownership of this team, especially among the juniors and seniors,” Bergloff said. “We’re excited to see what we’ve got — and the kids are, too. There’s a different feel around this team to start the year. The intensity in practices has been better.”

“Our expectation is to compete for a conference title. The section is tough because there are a lot of talented teams there. But our expectations are towards bigger and better things.”

Bergloff added that the strength of this team may be its ability to do well in a lot of different facets of the game.

“We’re not super-great in one area, but I think we’re strong in a lot of different areas,” he said. “We have solid pitching, and the top of the order will hit the ball well. I think our defense will be



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Cambridge-Isanti High School baseball team.

make-or-break.

“Our outfield may be as talented a group as I’ve ever had, so our infield defense — and how well we make plays — will be key. ... “We want to make the

simple plays. We’ll get strikeouts from our pitchers, but when the other team puts the ball in play, we need to secure the outs and shorten the game.”

Bluejacket softball looks to build upon success

JOHN WAGNER

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Coach: Cari Tohm.**Last season:** 17-5 overall, 11-1 Mississippi 8.**Top returnees:** Seniors Clara Rawson, CF; Hailey Schmidt, C-3B. Sophomore Taitum Kostecka, SS. Freshman Mackenzie Brooks, P.**Outlook:** Last season the Bluejackets posted one of the best seasons in the program’s recent history, claiming a Mississippi 8 title along the way.

But Tohm said her squad is haunted by two losses in the always-tough Section 7AAAA tournament.

“It’s a tough section with a lot of talent, but how we did in last year’s section has stuck with [our team],” she said. “We don’t want a repeat of that. And I think that has driven them to get ready for the season, and then for the section tournament.”

Tohm is excited that this year’s team does not feel pressure to recreate last year’s successes. Instead it looks to build off the triumphs from a year ago.

“They just want to come out and be better, faster and stronger,” she said. “We want to attack all the time. We



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Cambridge-Isanti High School softball team.

want to put ourselves out there and play as if every game could be their last game.

“To see how they hustle and support one another has been fun to watch.”

While C-I returns nine varsity players from a year ago, Tohm said the team already has suffered a setback as senior Peyton Vander Lee will not be able to return to the field after knee surgery in the fall.

“She is serving as a manager this year,” Tohm said of Vander Lee. “Unfortunately we won’t be able to get her

leadership on the field, but she’s still going to be with us, cheering us every step of the way from the dugout.”

Despite that loss, Tohm said last year’s success has given the team the confidence to do more this year.

“Not that this team lacked confidence, but last year at section, when we faced adversity, they didn’t bounce back as quickly as I had hoped,” she admitted. “We’ll have success if this team continues to support one another and back each other up.”

“If we stand by one another, this team can do anything. Everyone wants to be better to make sure this team is better.”

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Graduation losses reset C-I boys tennis lineup

JOHN WAGNER

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Coach: Thea Lowman.**Last season:** Won Mississippi 8 Conference title. Advanced to championship of Section 7AA team tournament.**Top returnees:** Senior Tinga Kiriago. Juniors Aiden Knudsvig, Cameron Bless.**Outlook:** Last year was a record-setting season for the Bluejackets thanks to a deep and talented senior class. But those 14 seniors are graduated, so there are plenty of new faces in the C-I lineup.

“Those seniors are off doing wonderful things, but their imprint is still on the program,” Lowman said. “And the lettermen who are back are taking over and showing leadership. This will be a different year because a number of our players lack varsity experience.”

There is some experience, including all-conference honorable mention choices Kiriago and Knudsvig. But the expectations for the coming spring will not be as bold as a year ago.

“We play some tough teams and some state-ranked players this spring,” Lowman said. “But these players faced our seniors from last year in practice, and they watched them in matches. They have seen the hard work and the dedication it takes [to succeed].”

“Our goal for this year is constant improvement, growing and learning from each match.”



PHOTO BY JOHN WAGNER

The 2026 Cambridge-Isanti High School boys tennis team.

As for Lowman, she embraces the challenge of determining her team's lineup for this season after a year ago having a lineup that required few tweaks.

“This year we have some freedom to try different combinations, offering kids different opportunities,” she said. “There are so many opportunities in our program this year, and we want players to grab those opportunities and grow with them. ...”

“Our lineups will change a lot over the season. Our kids have different opportunities, and not just [to play] singles or doubles, but also doubles with different partners. ... It's a wide-open picture where we can experiment, which can be liberating. To not be locked into a role might take some of the pressure off our players.”

North Branch native leads Fighting Hawks to Frozen Four berth

Croal named to all-tournament team as North Dakota advances to Frozen Four for first time since 2015-16

For the second year in a row, North Branch will be represented in the NCAA Division I men's hockey championships.

North Dakota, which features sophomore Cody Croal, punched its ticket for the Frozen Four with a pair of wins in the Sioux Falls Regional, shutting out Merrimack 3-0 on Thursday, March 26 before knocking off Quinnipiac 5-0 two nights later.

Croal scored two of his team's three goals in the win over Merrimack, scoring at 3:52 of the opening period and then adding an empty-net goal with 44 seconds left in the contest.

On Saturday Croal scored one of three first-period goals the Fighting Hawks notched against Quinnipiac, scoring at 8:14 of the period.

Croal was named to the all-tournament team for his performance as North Dakota, which was ranked second in

Division I entering the tournament, earned its first berth in the Frozen Four since the 2015-16 season.

The Fighting Hawks, who are 29-9-1 on the season, will face Wisconsin in one of the two Frozen Four games played in Las Vegas on Thursday, April 9.

Last season another North Branch native, Jack Harvey of Boston University, helped the Terriers reach the championship contest in the Frozen Four before falling to Western Michigan.



Cody Croal

Wild River Park hosts Maple Syrup Day April 11

Wild River State Park will hold its Maple Syrup Day on Saturday, April 11, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

There is no registration fee for the event, which will be held in the park's heated visitor center.

Those who attend can pick up a free maple syrup passport and begin their quest for a sweet treat. Those who visit all the stations will celebrate by drizzling maple syrup over ice cream.

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