Ludington Daily News THURSDAY, APRIL 22, 2021

INSIDE: MASON CO. EASTERN , PENTWATER AND MANISTEE CATHOLIC

PHOTO BY JEFF KIESSEL

www.ludingtondailynews.com Mason County Eastern baseball

Experience equals wins at MCE?

BY THE DAILY NEWS

CUSTER - Mason County Eastern's baseball team has several players that have experience, and fourth-year coach Ward Stever is hoping that it translates into a Western Michigan D League championship when the dust settles on the 2021 season.

The Cardinals have their ace pitcher in junior Wyatt the team captain. Crawford. Crawford was Crawford also will play some at first base this seawill be Darin Stever. Stever will otherwise play at shortstop, and he's been named



Brody Levi **Baker Weber** Hays

Brody Hays will play in the to button down the third all-WMD in his freshman outfield, at shortstop and he year as well as all-district. will be expected to pitch in relief some this season, too. He was all-district during his son. Eastern's No. 2 pitcher sophomore year, and Ward Stever sees Hays as a player that can play any position on the diamond.



Darin

Stever



James Drake is expected

base position, and he will

pitch some, too. Neal Stew-

art will be behind the plate

as the catcher, but he, too,

can play at third base as

well as at second base. Eli

Shoup will play in the out-

field and Stever says he



Neal Stewart

Wolf

Daniel

has a good bat. Eastern's roster:

SENIORS: Levi Baker Weber, Brody Hays, Darin Stever, Neal Stewart, Daniel Wolf, Evan Zerby.

JUNIORS: Keegan Bates, Wyatt Crawford, Eli Shoup **SOPHOMORE:** James Drake

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Evan

Zerby

FRESHMEN: Zachary Howe, Kaylor Leisure, Jude Mickevich, Clayton Shoup

"The team should compete for a league title and district title," Stever

said. "Lots of upper classmen to lead the younger guys."

Stever said he believes the league race could come down to his Cardinals and Mesick. However, he said Bear Lake and Brethren could also be tough challenges in the WMD, too.



JEFF KIESSEL | DAILY NEWS Mason Country Eastern's Brody Hays swings away at a pitch during the opening game of a doubleheader with Walkerville.



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www.ludingtondailynews.com Mason County Eastern track

Eastern girls have sights on title

BY THE DAILY NEWS

CUSTER - Mason County Eastern's girls track team has its sights set on winning the Western Michigan D League this season with a well-rounded roster.

There are several athletes that are returning to the squad from two seasons ago when spring sports were last competed in Ben Knizacky's 14th season with the Cardinals and 19th overall.

Hillary Howe was a state qualifier in the high jump two seasons ago, and she returns. Already this season. Corinna Hernandez has impressed in the shot put and discus, two events that she previously participated in.

Sydney Gage also is back in the high jump, and she ran middle distance two seasons ago for the Cardinals.

Howe had company in the pole vault with Kaela Blais and Jordyn Wittlieff.

The girls team adds several athletes to its roster that aim to make those championship goals a reality. Marta Papa, Mara Kaier and Lucia Huarte all figure to run sprints for the Cardinals. Papa will compete in the long jump and Kaier in the pole vault.

Eastern's girls roster:

SENIORS: Kaela Blais, Lucia Huarte Hilgado, Mara Kaier, Jordyn Wittlieff JUNIORS: Sydney Gage, Corinna Hernandez, Hillary Howe, Amelia

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Kaela Blais



Cuate-Hernandez Stewart

Malburg, Amelia Stewart. SOPHOMORES: Janessa Alvesteffer, Kiana Blais, Deanna Codman, Aralyn Donald, Miriam Manier, Ciearah Matlock. FRESHMEN: Olivia Wing, Kennady Tyler.

Neal

Lucia

Olivia Wing figures to compete in the hurdles, and she's already stood out this season in those events, too. Kennady Tyler will pole vault. Janessa Alvesteffer is expected to compete in the shot put and discus with Hernandez.

The boys team returns Raul Hernandez who was a state qualifier two years ago in the pole vault.

Also returning for the Cardinals'

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Jordyn Huarte Hilgado Wittlieff



Daniel Wolf

Shoup

turning sprinter. Eastern's boys roster:

> Cuate-Hernandez, Newal Stewart, Daniel Wolf JUNIORS: Donovan Harry, David Nash,

boys team is Neal

Stewart in middle

distance and pole

Eli Shoup will compete in dis-

high jump and

hurdles. Michael

Troost returns

for the high jump

and sprints. Da-

vid Nash is a re-

events,

vault.

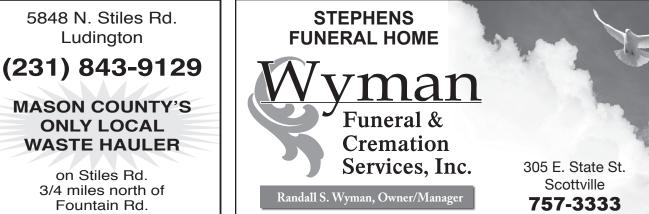
tance

Eli Shoup, Rylie Smith, Trevor Stimes, Michael Troost

SOPHOMORES: Adelio Cuate-Hernandez, Nathan Wing FRESHMEN: Jude Mickevich, Clayton

Knizacky believes the Cardinals will finish in the top three in the Western Michigan D League this season.

JEFF KIESSEL | DAILY NEWS Mason County Eastern's Sydney Gage hands the baton off to Olivia Wing as the two take part in the distance medley relay during a track and field meet earlier this season in Custer.





www.ludingtondailynews.com Mason County Eastern softball MCE gaining experience as it goes in 2021

BY THE DAILY NEWS

CUSTER - Mason County Eastern's softball team has a quartet of players that played from two springs ago, and those are the girls that coach Jacob Smith is depending upon with the program.

Last season was supposed Emily to be Smith's first coaching the Cardinals, but COVID-19 wiped out last spring.

and Skylar Harry.

Jessica Smith was second-



Robinson

Still, the Cardinals have mostly play at first base and three returning players in will pitch some. Fellow senior Jessica Smith, Hillary Howe Emily Robinson is slated to be at third base and outfield.

Jessica

Smith

Junior Hillary Howe is exteam all-Western Michigan D pected to play at shortstop League in 2019. Jacob Smith, and catcher, and she will

pitch some. Skylar Har- SOPHOMORES: Deanna Codry, a junior, is an utility player and will pitch.

"We have a lot of young players who haven't played any competitive softball, even rec ball, in over two years," Jacob Smith said. "We will have to allow them to make their mistakes on the field and try

her dad, said the senior will to learn from them on the fly."

Eastern's roster:

SENIORS: Jessica Smith and Emily Robinson JUNIORS: Hillary Howe and Skylar Harry

man, Janessa Alvesteffer and C.J. Matlock

FRESHMEN: Alexis Brummett, Taylor Campbell and Kennedy Tyler

The team will have more potential pitchers with sophomores Deanna Codman and Janessa Alvesteffer along with freshman Taylor Campbell. Codman is expected to play some at shortstop, and Alvesteffer is slotted for the outfield. Campbell will be an utility player.

Sophomore C.J. Matlock and freshman Kennady Tyler each are figured to be

in the outfield, and Tyler Manistee Catholic, Bear Lake is slotted for second base. Freshman Alexis Brummett figures to play at catcher.

The team also will see five of its players participate in track as well. Howe, Alvesteffer, Codman, Matlock and Tyler all participate in that sport, too.

"That is a huge commitment for them to try to manage two sports along with school," Jacob Smith said.

Smith expects Marion and Mesick to be in the hunt for the Western Michigan D League with Brethren and Pentwater close behind them. future years of softball at He thought Walkerville, Mason County Eastern."

and Eastern should fight for the middle of the league race.

Smith sees the 2021 season to be a bit of a blend of expectations.

"This will be a year of learning to compete at a high level. Our underclassmen will have to step into some huge roles for us and need to adapt quickly to the competitiveness of a varsity sport," he said. "Every game that the team gets to play this year will be a great advantage for them in the future as they continue their

Pentwater softball

Even with year off, Falcons load up with lots of experience

fact that in a year where almost all spring sports teams are essentially starting over, Pentwater's softball program Adams, Crysta Cluchey, Bailboasts as much experience on the roster as it's ever had.

Falcons' coach Steve Rossiter said that this is the most seasoned team he's had yet in six seasons, with back. Freshman Mackenna eight players back - six of them juniors.

"This is the first time in contributor.

There is some irony in the my career having varsityage athletes dominating my team," Rossiter said.

Those juniors are Haidyn ee Hasil, Mikaylyn Kenney, Emma Oliphant and Haley Powers. Sophomore Marissa Sayles, who played in 2019 as an eighth-grader, is also Hasil will be making her varsity debut, but should be a

Kenney, who pitched most ly. Powers is back in the out-shows at practice, so I am of the Falcons' games last field (though Rossiter said season, will again be the driving force of the team.

"She has grown so much over the years and her pitching is dialed in, making her an intimidating force on the mound," Rossiter said.

Adams is back at third base, and Hasil is at first. Both provide good defense, and Rossiter said Adams plays her position fearless-

she could play some infield too), and has improved immensely since first taking the field. Sayles and Mackenna Hasil both fill utility roles, with Hasil focusing on catching, a position she'll share with Crysta Cluchey.

"All of these girls have been working very hard to improve the offensive side of their game which really

very thrilled to see the improvements to this part of our game," Rossiter said.

the past, will still have their share of youth on this season's roster as well. Freshman Samantha Schaefer will make her debut this season, and three eighth-graders -Addison Bringedahl, Mandi Savles and Natalie Pavne will see some action as well.

The Falcons will take aim at some of the better teams in the West Michigan D League this year. Two sea-The Falcons, so young in sons ago, Rossiter said, his team played one of its bestever games in a 4-3 defeat against Mesick. With many players on that team back and two years older, he's interested to see what happens this time in that matchup. Marion, too, will provide that sort of challenge.





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Pentwater golf Young Falcons have ability

BY ANDY ROBERTS OCEANA'S HERALD-JOURNAL

Pentwater's golf team was one of the most damaged teams by the spring sports shutdown of 2020. The Falcons had several top senior players, including Gannon McDonough and Will Kolenda, who were primed to lead Pentwater to the next step after collecting the program's first regional title in 2019.

Time marches on, though, and now Pentwater does too. is very much looking for-The Falcons bring back only one golfer who played two and across the state," Koyears ago - sophomore Drew Kolenda, Will's brother. How- high and hope to work long ever, coach Alicia Kolenda and hard to achieve our said the new faces have the skills to live up to their predecessors.

complished," coach Kolenda excited for the challenge."

said of the past stars. "Starting out very similar with a very young team, this team also has the ability to shoot for the stars. They enjoy golfing together, and are looking forward to wearing their school colors to compete."

The players have largely grown up with the game, competing with their families and in local junior golf programs. They should be ready to jump into varsity play.

"The Pentwater golf team ward to competing locally lenda said. "We set our eyes previous goals. It's a young team, but we have time and experience on our side. We "Our new young team is know what it takes to beso empowered by all they ac- come champions, and we are

'It's a young team, but we have time and experience on our side.

Alicia Kolenda Pentwater golf coach

The Falcons enjoy testing themselves at local courses, competing at invitationals at Montague, two Shelby courses, and hosting opponents at Golden Sands. Kolenda said golf is always ready to add more faces.

"Golf is an awesome sport that tests both mind and body," Kolenda said. "Even if you don't know how to golf, it's OK. That's the coach's job to teach you. Just jump in and try it."

Manistee Catholic baseball Sabers mix vets, youth

BY GREG GIELCZYK DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

MANISTEE — Five players return from the 2019 season for the Manistee Catholic baseball team, including four seniors who will be expected to provide invaluable leadership for the group of youngsters on the squad in 2021.

Those youngsters include sophomore Lee Pizana, freshmen Luke Niedzielski, Nathan Oleniczak and Ian Madsen as well as eighth grader Tyler Hallead.

Pizana was on the team as an eighth grader two years ago, but coach Dillon Rankin isn't certain if he or any of the others played much summer ball so they might show a little rust early in the season.

"We do have that experience on the team, which I think will help," said Rankin, who begins his secsaid ond season at the helm. "They kind of know how things are run, and how I coach and they'll be able to help the younger guys."

The Sabers' roster is as follows:

SENIORS: Blake Johnson, Adam Pierce, Mateo Barnett and Austin Taylor. JUNIORS: Kyle McLinden, Edwin Dutkavich.

SOPHOMORE: Lee Pizana. FRESHMEN: Luke Niedzielski, Nathan Oleniczak, Ian Madsen. EIGHTH GRADER: Tyler Hal-

lead.

Rankin is looking at using seniors Mateo Barnett, Adam Pierce and Blake Johnson in the pitching rotation, but will mix in some other guys, too, including Pizana, the only lefthanded thrower on the team.

But with a packed schedule because of the late start and shortened season, Rankin is going to need to have some of the other guys to step up and provide the Sabers with an inning or two along the way.

"We have a good group of guvs. and I think they'll be able to rise to the occasion and give us a couple innings when we need them," Rankin remarked.

Rankin thinks the Sabers' infield will be pretty solid, although he's going to mix in some younger guys, such as Niedzielski at second base. Niedzielski will also play some outfield according to Rankin.

McLinden is a solid first baseman and gets the starting nod at that position. Filling out the rest of the infield will be Barnett, Pierce the district title." and Johnson.

Rankin likes the looks of his outfield as well, especially with senior Austin Taylor having seen some time out there two years ago.

Pizana also saw some time in the outfield as an eighth grader, and is expected to do a good job. Barnett and Pierce should see some time in centerfield.

"Nobody is going to have a specific position," Rankin allowed. "There'll be guys flip flopping around for sure. But, I think we'll be pretty solid. We work on cuts and relays religiously." Hitting is a little more un-

certain. "It's tough to tell," Rankin said. "These guys play a lot

of different sports. Only a couple of them might have played summer baseball, so it's been quite awhile since they've had a bat in their hands.

"So it's going to take some time to get that timing down. But we're going to play some small ball. We're going to bunt, we're going to be smart at the plate...

"We're going to run everything out, and we're going to play hard. We'll manufacture runs. Our goals are to win the conference (Western Michigan D League) and

Pentwater track Pentwater returns 10, including 3 state qualifiers

BY ANDY ROBERTS OCEANA'S HERALD-JOURNAL

Pentwater brings back 10 athletes from the 2019 track teams, which should lead to a good deal of success.

are state qualifiers. Khole Falcons during cross-coun-Hofmann qualified in both hurdles events and in the 800-meter relay team, which returning teammate Jordan Bales was also on. On the girls' side, Jocelyn Richison is also a returning state qual- a rise in coronavirus cases. It ifier, having made it in the was an early reminder of the 300 hurdles.

"In addition to the 10 returnees we have, there are

to us, either as freshmen even know what the meet or brand new to the sport," Falcons' coach Erika Fatura said.

Season prep has been limited due to other sports and COVID-19 precautions, but Three of the returnees Fatura did see several of her try season as well.

> Pentwater's season was disrupted before conference action even began, as the school called a sevenday pause in activity due to challenges this season presents.

"From week to week, it is nine others who are new just a challenge to plan and

line up will look like," Fatura said. "For this reason, my emphasis is going to be more on individual goals and personal records.

"I am just hoping we are able to compete and get through the majority of our season. This last year has taught us a lot and one of the biggest lessons is to be grateful for opportunities... Our kids need to feel the joys of meeting goals, the heartbreak of not meeting them, the value of camaraderie, importance of teamwork and most of all the opportunity to push themselves to be better."



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Manistee Catholic softball Heck takes reins of Sabers softball program

BY GREG GIELCZYK DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

MANISTEE — Kaytlin Heck returns to her alma mater as the new girls softball coach at Manistee Catholic, and she has 15 girls on the roster, which is more than when she played for the Sabers.

The higher number of athletes gives Heck more flexibility to mix and match, and use a longer bench to keep all of her players fresh and strong.

Heck added that more than half of the team has

perience will come in han- Heck remarked. "You've re- and all of them have played pressed by what she's seen dy when the Sabers hit the meaty part of their schedule in the Western Michigan D League.

"They've got a good background," Heck says. "I see a lot of potential.'

Kaya Watkins and Camryn Sutcliffe are the only seniors on the team. Watkins usually is situated behind the plate as the catcher, and when she's not she'll be at third base. Sutcliffe patrols the outfield and moves over to first on occasion.

"Catcher is the only one played before, and that ex- who can see the whole field,"

ally got to be on top of it for your team back there and tell everyone what's going on.

"She does a good job of that. When she's at third she's good, too. She has a really nice arm to get the ball over to first base with a good, hard throw. I can't wait to see what she does."

Heck admits she doesn't know about Sutcliffe, but has been impressed with what she's seen from her in the few practices the Sabers have had.

The Sabers also five juniors and four sophomores, softball. Both of the pitchers Heck will be throwing are sophomores.

Kaylyn Johnson and Emily Miller are the two pitchers. Johnson actually catches for Miller when she's pitching, and the two have developed a solid relationship on the field.

"They are a dynamic duo," Heck said. "They work well together. They know each other's pace, and they click very well, which is really important between pitcher and catcher."

Heck has also been im-

from the play on the infield, especially the strong throws and how well the fielders can scoop up the ground balls and snag line drives.

Freshman shortstop Grace Kidd is quick, and that speed gives her the range needed at the position. Heck is excited to she how she'll perform in a game.

"I think we have a lot to work with if need be, to switch players around,' Heck said. "We're still narrowing the outfield down to one or two girls who can play each position well."

With the late start, and spring break, the Sabers haven't done much work on their hitting. But the couple times they've taken batting practice Heck has been pleased with what she's seen.

As far as the Western Michigan D League goes, Heck doesn't have much of a scouting report and is hoping to know more after a couple of weeks.

Heck is just wants to have the Sabers gain some confidence and put together some wins before the districts roll around.

Manistee Catholic boys golf Sabers lack experience as 2021 season gets underway

BY GREG GIELCZYK DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

MANISTEE — Last year was going to be a transition year for the Manistee Catholic boys golf team from a group that had gone to the state finals three years in a row to some of the young players is just trying to keep the athtaking over.

But last year was lost to the pandemic, and so the Sabers are jumping into the unchartered waters of a team that lacks the experience.

With the uncertainty of whether high school sports will be shut down as COV-ID-19 cases are spiking again in the state, everyone is looking nervously at what Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and the health department will do.

Sabers' coach Denis Meikle letes safe and healthy, following all the regulations mandated by the health department so there can be a season ... especially for the two seniors.

Meikle reports that despite 2019 as sophomores, and athletes. the potential to have the season taken away from them again, the players have all turned out for practice and done their due diligence.

Everyone is anxious to just get back to playing golf competitively against other teams, and vying for the Western Michigan D League title and aiming for a run at a spot in the state finals again. Blake Johnson and Henry Hybza are the two seniors who were on the team in

both are expected to do well. Johnson is also on the baseball team and Hybza competes in track, which limits their practice time with the golf team. But have been making golf practices religiously since they started.

"If we can get some practice and get some meets in, I expect both of them to be pretty steady," Meikle said. "They both hit the ball good, (and) they're both talented

"But, they're not accomplished competitive golfers. So far, I've been pleasantly surprised with them."

The juniors are Brendan McComb, Alex Shriver and Mallory Meikle who have been on the team since their early years, and are also exceptionally steady golfers with a little more experience than the seniors.

Since they are still young, coach Meikle is trying to polish their games a little bit dual matches.

more. But they, too, are hitting the ball well in practice. Rounding out the team are

sophomore Matthew Gunia and Jamie Riley.

"We've got some experience and youth," Meikle said. "It's interesting. If I can get them practicing and get them playing, we could be pretty good."

Meikle said the Sabers have a pretty active schedule, including some invitationals as well as some new





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Manistee Catholic track

Barnett to lead Lipa-guided Sabers

BY GREG GIELCZYK DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

MANISTEE — With a couple athletes quarantining because of COVID-19, and a couple more on the fence about coming out, the Manistee is a strong sprinter as well Catholic track and field program, boys and girls, still has just under 20 rostered athletes to start the 2021 season.

The major returning athlete on the boys team this County Eastern cross counnior who qualified for state the state meet," Lipa said. two years ago and who'll be "I think he'll be a strong dissplitting time with the base- tance runner this year.' ball team.

in the 100- and 200-yard Stickney and Josie Ziehm are

coach John Lipa — who'll be assisted by former head man Gabe Wise — is understandably looking for big things from him again in 2021.

Keeton Čapling, a junior, and should press Barnett to retain his top role on the squad in that category according to Lipa.

"He was part of the Mason year is Mateo Barnett, a se- try team that qualified for

On the girls' side, Kaitlyn Barnett competed at state Duke, Elena Pizana, Leah

sprints, and first-year Sabers' the returners from 2019 and actually are the team going into the season.

Lipa said he has a handful of others who signed up for the team, but they are under quarantine because of COV-ID-19 and have yet to practice.

"We have some newcomers on the boys' side, and I think we can have a strong relay team," Lipa remarked. "Like the sprint relays, and even the mile relay.

"Keeton and Mateo put us in a good spot for the conference (Western Michigan D League), and even beyond," Lipa stated.

Among the newcomers are

'We have some newcomers on the

boys' side, and I think we can have a

strong relay team. John Lipa

Manistee Catholic track coach

Lee Pizana, who is also playing baseball this spring, Nick Sturgeon, Adam Pierce (another athlete dividing time with baseball) and Dean Sturgeon who are all sprinters. Ryker Capling, a fresh-

er sprinter.

Henry Hybza's younger cy." brother Peter Hybza will be running with the distance crew with Jamie Riley, while David Kosla is going to be the Sabers' thrower in the shot put and discus.

"It's hard to tell how everything is going to pan out number for state. with COVID and everything else," Lipa said. "Kosla needs to work on his technique and get stronger. I think he's capable of doing well in the conference.

"We're already a week behind because of the delay to start the season, but it's just ance and how to roll with the good to have the kids get out punches.

man, gives the Sabers anoth- and compete again. They need some sense of normal-

> Although the Sabers lack depth, individually Lipa is confident they can do quite well. He's particularly enthused about having some league champions in the sprints, and qualifying a

Because of the pandemic, invitational meets are limited to eight schools so there isn't the opportunity to get involved with bigger meets to prepare for the regional.

Lipa is focusing on teaching the athletes persever-

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