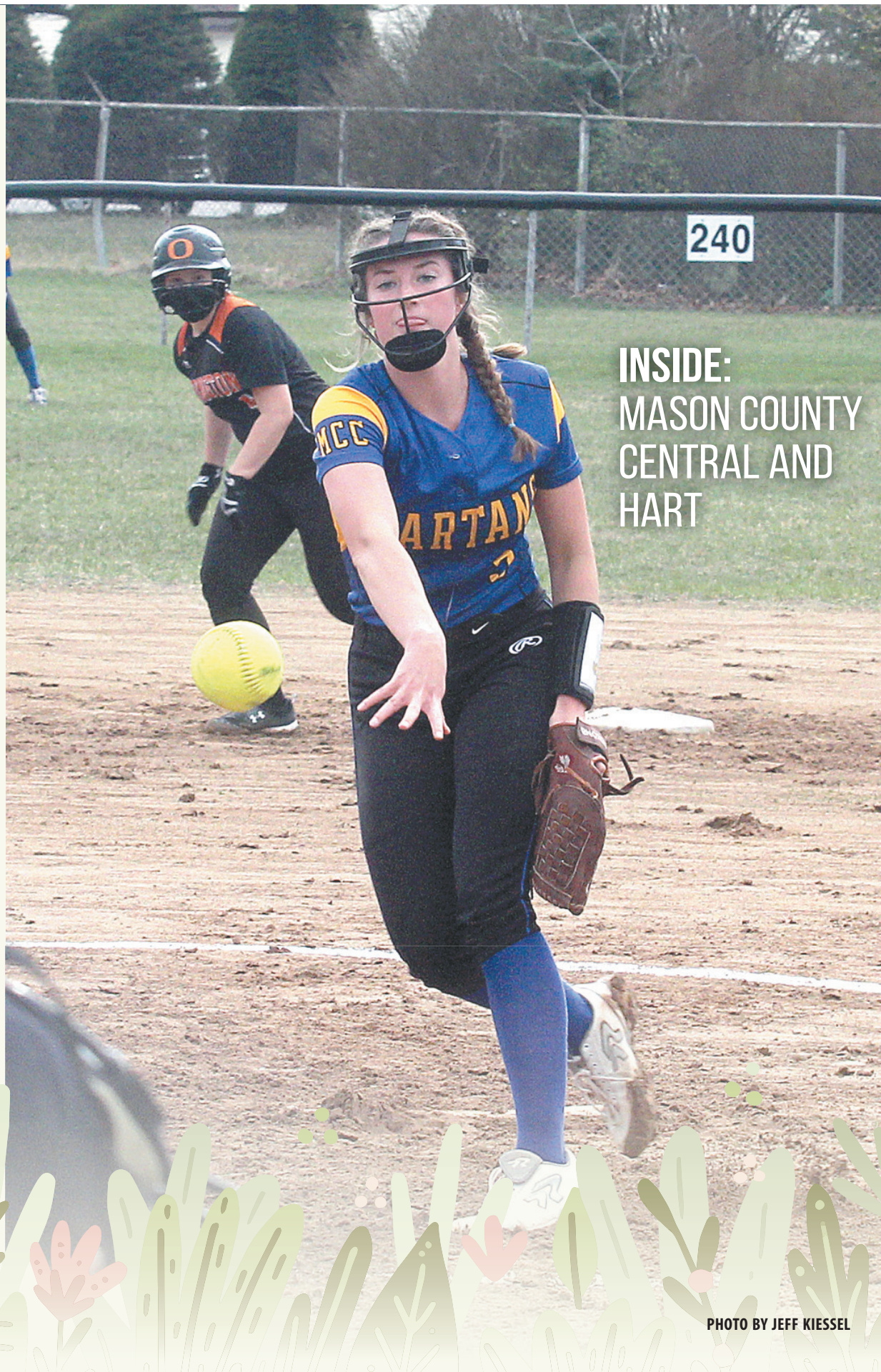


SPRING SPORTS

Ludington
Daily News

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INSIDE:
MASON COUNTY
CENTRAL AND
HART

PHOTO BY JEFF KIESSEL

Mason County Central baseball

Central baseball going with youth



Ethan Johnson



Jackson Kimes



Hunter White

SCOTTVILLE — Mason County Central's baseball team will lean on three seniors with varsity experience for the 2021 season.

Chris Carr, in his fourth season, has three seniors that are back from two seasons ago: Ethan Johnson, Jackson Kimes and Hunter White. White was the most decorated as he was all-West Michigan Conference two years ago as well as all-district. White pitches and plays at shortstop.

Kimes pitches and plays in

the outfield, and Johnson catches and plays at shortstop.

That leaves a lot of underclassmen.

"We are starting three underclassmen which makes us a young team," Carr said. "At times, we will be starting four underclassmen which will consist of two sophomores and two freshmen. I still feel we are going to compete well in every game. We have a team to build on."

One of those sophomores that

should make an impact is Will Chye. Chye pitches and plays in the outfield.

Central's roster:

SENIORS: Ethan Johnson, Jackson Kimes, Hunter White, Jacob Mortenson

JUNIORS: Gage Ruiz, Jacob Johnson, Raiden Keefer.

SOPHOMORES: Will Chye, Simon Shimel, Jayden Shirey, Tyler Thurow, Hunter Ohrling

FRESHMEN: Owen Shimel, Braylin Thurow, River Thurow, Brayden

Overmyer

"Will has a great ability to find a way on base and has excellent speed which makes him a threat every time he gets on (base)," Carr said.

Carr said he believes Oakridge is the team to beat.

"I see Oakridge as the top (team) in the conference," he said. "With a lot of hard work and focus we can compete and be in the top tier."

Mason County Central softball

Spartans led on diamond by Ahlfeld in circle

SCOTTVILLE — Mason County Central's softball team will be a blend of some experience for the 2021 season to go with a sweeping youth movement as Jonathan Blake starts his third season as the coach of the Spartans.

The biggest returning player is Morgen Ahlfeld. Ahlfeld was honorable mention All-State two seasons ago while also earning All-West Michigan Conference

honors as well as all-district honors. Ahlfeld is a stand-out pitcher, and she's joined by returning players Braylen Green, Reagan Wiese and Allie Mast.

The team has several newcomers, and they're largely freshmen and sophomores, Blake said.

"(The) great news is that they are all very athletic, have been working hard this off-season and will be contributing, not just playing," Blake

said.

Blake said he expects his team to be able to compete with every single team it matches up against this spring.

"With a pitcher and leader in the circle like we have this year, (Ahlfeld) alone will keep us in most games so as long as we limit our errors and hit the way I know we can. We should win more than we lose," he said.

Blake said the WMC race

should be tight with strong teams in the league throughout. But he likes his team's chances.

"I feel very confident that we should be right in the mix and hopefully come out on top this year," he said.

One of the games that the Spartans have circled on their calendar for the season is a Pink Out Game scheduled for May 20 against Bear Lake. Blake's son is the head coach at Bear Lake this spring.

Mason County Central's Braylen Green delivers a pitch to home plate during Friday's home game against Frankfort.

JEFF KIESSEL | DAILY NEWS



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Mason County Central boys track Nelson ready for his shot with boys track program

SCOTTVILLE — Patrick Nelson will finally get his shot at coaching the whole Mason County Central boys program this spring as his rookie season was wiped out COVID-19.

The Spartans have a handful of athletes that competed in their previous years that are back to help lead the way.

Seniors Jay Danielson and Gage Tyron both return for the Spartans. Danielson runs distance events while Tyron runs middle distance events.

Four key juniors are also returning in Ethan Wood, Jeremiah Patterson, Xander Gajeski and Andrew Quinn. Patterson was the West Michigan Conference champion in the high jump during his freshman year, and

Gajeski finished fourth in the 100-meter dash at the regional during his freshman year. Wood competes in the pole vault and Quinn participates in the throws.

The Spartans add a pair of sophomores to its crew that should stand out, Nelson said. Jayden Perrone is a versatile athlete that could compete in the pole vault, high jump and sprints. Gavin Shirey is expected to run the distance events after a strong cross country season.

Nelson believes the Spartans could finish in the top half of the West Michigan Conference.

“Our team has individuals who can perform well in all events,” Nelson said. “Our lack of depth will hurt in the relays. We have 18 athletes

on the team.”

However, the Spartans will have to get past some tough competition, though.

“I see Whitehall and Hart competing for the league title, possibly Montague,” he said. “Hard to know what teams now have since we haven’t seen any times or distances from freshman or sophomore classes due to last year’s cancellation.”

Nelson is being assisted by Maria Holbrook and Katie Cooper, and he expects to work with his dad, Ben Nelson, as well as former boys coach Scott Briggs.

“(It) has been a difficult two years for our spring athletes, but the athletes have had a good attitude and have been working hard,” Patrick Nelson said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Members of the Mason County Central boys track team are, front row, from left, Ethan Wood, and Xander Gajeski; middle row, Eric Resendiz and Gavin Shirey; back row, coach Patrick Nelson, David Robinson, Kyle Fulton, Jay Danielson, Riley McLouth, Nick Trivisonno, Max Nichols, Russell, Schade, Gage Tyron, Keegan Dunn and Andrew Quinn.

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Mason County Central girls track Tyron leading Spartans girls in her senior season

SCOTTVILLE — Mason County Central's girls track team has a handful of athletes back from two seasons ago as coach Ben Nelson starts his 27th year guiding the Spartans girls track program.

Seniors Nyah Tyron and Mackenzie Singleton return as does Junior Amaya Battice. Tyron ran as a part of a state runner-up 1,600-meter relay team two seasons ago. She also was third in the state two years ago in the 300-meter hurdles and she was fourth in the 100-meter hurdles.

Both Battice and Singleton compete in the throwing events. Battice was third in the West Michigan Conference in the shot put.

The Spartans will add two standouts, Nelson said, with Jaden Petersen and Jayden Baker. Petersen is expected to run in the 1,600, 800 and some relays, and Nelson noted she was an excellent cross country runner. Baker is expected to run in the 200 and 400, and he said Baker has a great attitude and is a hard worker.

Central's roster:

SENIORS: Nyah Tyron and Mackenzie Singleton

JUNIORS: Amya Battice and Jaden Petersen

SOPHOMORE: Priscilla Johnson

FRESHMEN: Jayden Baker, Ava Brooks, Bryce Stevens, Marissa Quinlan and manager Reagan Brooks.

The team will add sophomore Priscilla Johnson who will run in the 200, 400 and relays, as will freshman Jayden Baker. Ava Brooks will run middle distance relays. Freshmen Bryce Stevens and Marissa Quinlan are expected to run in the hurdles and relays with Stevens likely to compete in the pole vault.

Central doesn't have a lot of numbers, so Nelson doesn't think his team will fare well in the duals, but could do well in larger meets and invitationals.

"Hart and Montague (are) frontrunners. Whitehall will have the numbers though," Nelson said.

Overall, Nelson said he expects the season to be interesting.

"All of the teams are in the same boat as far as having the 2020 season off," he said. "I get the chance to coach with my son Patrick and continue to work with my longtime assistant/co-coach Maria Holbrook."



Members of the Mason County Central girls track team are, from left, Reagan Brooks, Marissa Quinlan, Priscilla Johnson, Amya Battice, Jaden Petersen, Nyah Tyron, Bryce Stevens and Ava Brooks. Not pictured: Mackenzie Singleton and Jayden Baker.

COURTESY PHOTO

Mason County Central boys golf Spartans going with brand-new line-up in 2021

The Mason County Central boys golf team is down to four members for the 2021 season, but coach Tim Genson is hopeful that he could

have a couple more start up play this season.

"They're all new players, (so I am) getting to know their games," Genson said.

"We hope to improve each week all season.

"(I'm) excited to have a spring season and opportunity for the kids to compete

this year."

Central's roster:

JUNIOR: Jacob Maidens

SOPHOMORE: Kolden Mier

FRESHMEN: Ryan Budzynski and Wyatt Green.

In Genson's 13th season, he sees Whitehall as the top

school in the West Michigan Conference. He also thinks Montague may challenge the Vikings for the league championship.



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Mason County Central soccer

Key players back for Spartans

SCOTTVILLE — Mason County Central's girls soccer team has three key players back from two seasons ago as coach Cheri Stibitz enters her ninth season.

Two are co-captains, seniors Charley McCabe and Mia McHenry. McCabe plays midfield and forward.

"We will look for her to be very helpful in the mid-to upper areas of the field,"

Stibitz said. "She has good ball control skills, and I am hoping she can hit some outside shots on net."

McHenry will anchor the defense.



Charley McCabe



Mia McHenry

"Mia's leadership skills will lead the defensive line," Stibitz said.

Bronwyn Stevens, a junior, is the only other returning player. She plays at

forward and midfield.

"Bronwyn has really grown as a player this year, and we look forward to seeing what she can do with the offensive line," Stibitz said.

The team adds a handful of standouts for the season. Junior Adria Quigley is with the team as are sophomores Gabrielle Jensen, Ashlyn McKay and Charlie Banks. Stibitz said this sea-

son is Quigley's first playing the sport, and she is learning the game and skills, but has shown leadership with the team.

Jensen will play some as a goalie and at midfield. McKay and Banks both are expected to play defense.

"This team is very young and inexperienced," Stibitz said. "We have four returning players, and the rest

have either never played soccer or played on childhood teams. They listen very well and are quick learners. We will see great improvements from this group of players."

Because of the season off last year from 2020, Stibitz said she wasn't sure how the West Michigan Conference race would shake out.

Hart softball

Several returning players for Pirates in 2021

HART — Hart enters 2021 with a good deal of experience - and successful experience at that.

The Pirates have two all-West Michigan Conference performers back from the last season played, in 2019. Junior Skylar Smith, who also earned all-region honors in 2019 as a freshman, and senior Myrissa Hopkins both return. In addition, seniors Cassidy Copenhaver and Rylee Noggle

are back, as are juniors Finley Kistler, Kloe DuMonte, Audry Swihart, Morgan Marvin, Ella Smith and Sabrina Pickard.

Those players and others were able to participate in some limited four-person workouts and get some gym time in during the fall, helping the Pirates get set for what could be a very good year.

"Hart has a great mix of talent and youth this year,

which is really exciting going forward," Pirates' coach Rocky Smith said.

The Pirates will be tested as always in a rugged West Michigan Conference that includes perennial power Oakridge and tough teams like Whitehall, North Muskegon and Montague. Smith said games against teams like Hesperia and Newaygo should also get the Pirates ready for postseason play.

Hart baseball

Pirates looking to gain experience on diamond

HART — Hart may be looking at a rebuilding season in 2021 with only one varsity-experienced player on the team, but coach Dave Riley is looking forward to seeing what a hardworking group of juniors can do, too.

Senior Rece Schluker is the only Pirate on the roster that has played varsity baseball, in 2019. Riley said Schluker has gone all-in on this baseball season after missing out on his junior year.

"(He) is committed to making the most of his last season," Riley said. "Rece is a hard worker and a leader for us."

Several juniors will play big roles for Hart this year, armed only with the experience gained on the JV team as freshmen, and the Pirates will have some underclassmen in the lineup whose last organized baseball was played in summer 2019 rec leagues.

"While we don't compare to the league's top teams in this area of experience, there is a lot to like about the group of kids I have on this team," Riley said. "The group we have are hard workers and eager to learn...I am excited to watch them improve each day."

"The players and coaches alike are excited to return to playing the game. We look forward to the team aspect that was missed last spring."

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Hart track and field

Lofty goals for Pirates on track

HART — Hart's track teams enter the season with high hopes of competing at the state finals and scoring highly. And the Pirates have the talent to back up those hopes.

"We have some pretty lofty goals for the Hart boys, and I think the girls would feel the same way," Hart boys coach Ken Kimes said. "I think both the boys and girls will have a run at being one of the top teams at state. It'd be great to see them both be in the top four."

Leading the team, of course, will be the Pirates' distance crew, which spearheaded the girls' fourth straight state championship and the boys' runner-up finish in cross-country last fall. On the girls' side, Savannah Ackley, Audrey Enns, Lynae Ackley and Lauren VanderLaan should score well there, and the boys have Alex Enns, Clayton Ackley, Seth Ackley, Easton VanderZwaag and more to pile up points in distance runs.

Michael Tubbs and George Alvesteffer are two other varsity Pirates who are back from the 2019 season for the boys, and sophomore Kellen Kimes, Ken's son, should contribute some big points in the field events. He is strong in the throws and the pole vault. Alvesteffer is also a strong throw-

er. Tubbs can contribute in several events.

The girls have more than just distance runners to rely on. Aspen Boutell is a good sprinter and long jumper. VanderLaan will contribute in the middle distances.

Getting ready for the season was a challenge amid COVID-19 precautions, but Kimes said senior leaders helped get athletes together to get their work in.

Girls coach Calvin Ackley said one unfortunate side effect of the precautions is fewer of the big meets. This year, track meets are limited to eight schools, or 16 if only boys or girls compete.

"We really look forward to the big invitationals to see how we stack up against a variety of talent across the state," Ackley said. "Unfortunately, it will be much more difficult to pool a lot of talent at one meet. This is very disappointing."

In the meantime, while Hart's strong veteran performances are sure to lead to points, Kimes hopes the development of some young athletes leads to even bigger things.

"If we can get some of the younger kids to come through, maybe make it to state and score a point, that's the key for us to maybe bring home a trophy," Kimes said.



ANDY ROBERTS | OCEANA'S HERALD-JOURNAL
Hart's Audrey Enns (right) takes the baton from teammate Lynae Ackley during the 3,200-meter relay at a triangular meet this season in Shelby. The Pirate distance runners dominated the meet.

Hart boys golf Pirates start off with completely new lineup in 2021

HART — Hart's golf team hasn't had much team success in recent years, but coach Jen Hlady isn't concerned about bringing home trophies as much as getting

outside and having her team enjoy themselves.

The Pirates have a brand new roster this year, as everyone on the 2019 team has departed.

"We are looking forward to having a season, being able to get out on the links and have fun golfing," Hlady said.

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Hart soccer

Pirates return nearly all players from 2019 season

HART — Hart brought back essentially no players from the 2019 team for this season - one late-season call-up from the JV - and that team struggled. Pirates' coach Joe Gilbert is fully aware of what he's getting into, so much so that the team has rejiggered its schedule to account for how young it is.

For many, the Pirates' Apr. 6 opener against Manistee was their first 11-on-11 soccer game.

In the long term, Gilbert hopes to push higher participation at the rec levels. Hart doesn't play middle school rec soccer because other sports draw attention and players can't play multiple sports in that season.

"They don't play rec for sixth through eighth grade,

then they come into high school, and it's like, 'OK, I haven't played since fifth grade. Here we go.'" Gilbert said. "That's something I've been working with our rec director to help build over the past couple of years to get more girls and boys involved. It's going to take our school community to commit to multi-sport athletes. We're not a Whitehall or an Oakridge. We have to have everybody out there."

In the meantime, the Pirates did the work that they could when gyms opened up, mostly on conditioning, which is still an area of focus for the team.

Some of the games aren't likely to be much fun for the Pirates, particularly the high-level West Michi-

gan Conference opponents like Whitehall, North Muskegon and Oakridge. However, Gilbert said he hopes the team will be able to take something from matchups against more representative opponents like Mason County Central, Chippewa Hills and rival Shelby.

To see improvement this year, the Pirates, Gilbert said, will simply need to make the choice to put the time and effort in to do so. As of the season opener, Hart had not yet had an issue with COVID-19, and the Pirates hope it stays that way.

"It's them making the choice to be here and making sure they're here and ready to go," Gilbert said. "We'll cross that bridge when we get there."



Shelby's Haydee Pedroza (10) tries to get the ball away from Hart's Marissa Goodrich during a game at Shelby. The Tigers won, 8-0.

ANDY ROBERTS | OCEANA'S HERALD-JOURNAL



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