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Red Raiders grow into contenders

By Chris Miles

Kyle Cutler and his staff are starting to see the fruits of their labor.

The London High School football coach took over a program in the spring of 2014 that was in desperate need of attention. The Red Raiders at the time lacked direction, depth and confidence and seemed to be going nowhere fast.

Cutler went to work on building something tangible and here at the beginning of his fourth season appears to have his program primed for a breakout year.

“We’re improving on a daily basis, we’re getting great senior leadership,” the coach said. “This is the first time with a true senior class (14 players). Having that many seniors gives us a chance to be competitive in every game.

“It’s also a boost for the school and the community. People are excited about the season and excited about what we’re doing.”

The Red Raiders are optimistic about the possibility of competing for a Mid-State League championship this season.

The league remains as tough as its been in recent years, it’s just that London should be better equipped at playing with the likes of Whitehall, Grandview, Columbus Academy and Bexley.

One reason for that optimism is the fact that the older players currently on the roster were able to get playing time early in their careers.

It starts in the trenches and with the return of seniors Jacob Jones, Hayden Huff, Caleb Whitacre and Tavian Tyree.

That foursome has been through the battles over the years and appears ready for the challenges that lie ahead.

“We’ve got good size up front,” the coach said.

KJ Price will be the featured tailback and will get a chance to shine behind a seasoned group of lineman.

Josh Handley and Juane Gardner are battling for the starting quarterback position. Handley seems to have a slight edge in that competition.

“Experience is a great thing to have,” Cutler said. “In practice and game situations we know what we’re going to get. We’ve got guys who have been in there two, three, four seasons and know what it takes to be successful. The thing we get with experience is some consistency. We have a much better idea of who we are and what we can do.”

The coach said he’s also able to add more things in because his players are more experienced and understand what’s being asked of them.

Defensively London will be stronger and faster.

Bricker Thiel, Tyler Tobin, Jimmy Dulin and Trent Hart are just a handful of names of players expected to make an impact on the Red Raiders defense.

There are many more players this year who will be able to contribute on Friday nights.

“Our numbers have always been an issue,” Cutler said. “Bringing our numbers up is huge. Having kids interested in the football program is important. Looking at successful programs, they can take their time and develop kids from earlier ages. We’re starting to do that. We established a base with this group as freshman and built this up the right way.”

While London is expecting to be better than the 3-7 record it posted last year, it will still face a tough schedule.

“There are five teams on our schedule that made the playoffs last year and seven teams that won 75 percent of their games,” Cutler said. “We’re in a good league, but I really expect us to be competing with all of those teams.

“We’ve got to worry about us, we’ve got to do the best job with our kids. If we do that I think we’ll be pretty good.”

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Pioneers loaded with talent

Alder looking for third straight playoff appearance

By Chris Miles
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All the pieces are again in place to make another league championship push and another run at the state playoffs and Jonathan Alder head football coach Brett Glass wouldn’t have it any other way.

With skilled veterans back in a lot of key places, the Pioneers have the look of a squad determined to make more than a casual playoff visit. The team has been in the playoffs the last two seasons but each of those times the postseason lasted all of one game. If the team can stay healthy and continue to progress, there’s an opportunity for much more this season.

“Things are shaping up well,” Glass said. “It’s always difficult to tell exactly what you’re going to be like on Friday nights, but things are shaping up well.

“Our kids have taken it upon themselves of continuing a renewed tradition here. We’ve won conference championships the last two years and been in the playoffs. Our kids are taking pride in this and want to continue to get better.”

Excitement about the season starts with the fact that so many players are back in key roles, including senior quarterback Preston Eisnaugle. He has been the signal caller the last two seasons and his experience and ability give Alder a huge advantage heading into 2017.

“It all starts with him leading the way,” the coach said. “He’s a big part of what we’re going to do offensively. He knows the offense and has been a leader the last couple years.”

Also back in the mix is bruising senior running back Jamie Dye. He rushed for more than 1,500 yards last season in earning second team All-Central District honors.

In addition to having a three-year starter at quarterback and a 1,500-yard rusher in the backfield, the Pioneers will have three of their five starters back on the offensive line in seniors Nolan Larison and Jacob Sullivan as well as junior Caleb Howell.

“When you have this many kids back you can go faster through things,” Glass said. “We have a lot of continuity in scheme and coaching staff and the kids are picking things up faster.”

One area where Alder will be different in 2017 is in the pass game. Last year the team could rely on Trey Pugh (Tight End at Northwestern University) and wide out Andrew Koenig to make big plays through the air. They’re gone, but the replacements have proven themselves to be players.

Dalton Potts was the No. 3 option in the pass game a year ago and stepped up late in the season when the other two went down. He will be joined by Bryan Blacka on the outside. Blacka was a first team all-district selection last year at cornerback.

Blacka and Potts were both all-district picks in the defensive backfield a year ago, they combined for over 10 interceptions. The combo returns to give Alder one of the best secondaries in Central Ohio.

“They are proven playmakers,” Glass said. “There’s a lot of talent and ability out there.”

Alder will make the move from the Mid-Ohio Athletic Conference to the Central Buckeye Conference. The new league will be strong but Alder should be right in the mix for a conference championship.

“We have a history of playing a couple of those teams in the playoffs (Springfield Shawnee and Kenton Ridge). Our players know how good the players and talent are in this league.”
Optimism in the air for MPHS

By Chris Miles
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There's a buzz surrounding the Madison-Plains High School football team this season.
The Golden Eagles have yet to play a single game, but there's an excitement and ironically it has very little to do with who's on the team but rather who is or isn't on the schedule this fall.
The Madison-Plains High School football team will begin play in the Ohio Heritage Conference this fall, leaving behind the Mid-State League Ohio Division, the league the team has called home for the last few years. It's the move to the new league that has people looking forward to the upcoming season.

“I think there's optimism, I think in the community there's more optimism about this season,” coach Jason Hunt said.
“It's still a good schedule, it's not like we're playing a schedule that's not good, because we are.

“It's a different, good schedule. We're playing schools that are our same size, from communities like ours. It's not going to be like going to Whitehall, where they just overwhelmed you with their athleticism. It's not Harvest Prep or Bexley or Grandview or even London which has so many good athletes. We're playing teams that are like us, our players know it, our coaches know it and so do our fans. I think that's what's making people so optimistic about this year.”
The Golden Eagles fans are going to see a collection of older players who have grown up in Hunt's system. Beginning his fifth season at the helm, the coach has his biggest senior class ever. With 15 players who know nothing but Hunt as the man in charge, there's a familiarity of the system which they'll be playing.

Hunt's system will be built around that senior class. His offensive line includes returning starters Griffin Jones, Ian Richards and Jacob Ballard. The skill position players will include senior running backs Ryan Bevington and Logan Toops.
They'll help an inexperienced quarterback, whoever wins the starting job, get comfortable under center.

“With a young quarterback we're going to have to do things differently. But having experienced guys like Chris Coil, Ryan Bevington and Logan Toops will help.”

Defensively Hunt said his linebacking crew is the strength on that side of the ball. Those players include Bevington, Coil, Jones and senior Nick Thompson.

“That linebacking corp is very strong, it's a big change from where we were a year ago,” the coach said.

Playing in the Ohio Heritage Conference won't be completely foreign to Plains. The team has played new conference foes Southeastern, Greeneview and Cedarville in recent years, winning a majority of those games.

“I think this is going to be a good fit for us,” he said.

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Success

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We have kids who have played a lot and been in our system for years. That breeds confidence. They expect to compete at a high level. We haven't had a bad practice yet.”

Senior quarterback Lance Lambert returns to lead what could potentially be a potent West Jeff attack.

“He does all the things an experienced quarterback should do,” the coach said. “He's a great young man, a class kid and understands it's not about him but the team.”

Lambert will be orchestrating Buescher's offense with the help of a bevy of talented skill position players. That list includes running backs Ethan Higgins, Austin Swaney, Wyatt Dillion and Gabe Jones.

“They'll all play in the backfield, it's the coach's job to put them in the best position to succeed.”

Jordan South and Justin Gatley give West Jeff a pair of talented tight end targets. On the outside Jake Boyd, Caleb VanHook, Justin Williams, Zach Graham, Justin Hooker and Trent Eitel provide the ability to stretch the field.

First team All-Ohio selection Gunnar Doran returns to the offensive line, along with Cole Howard, Luis Carmona, Chet Lohr, Hunter Braithwaite, Michael Christz and Nate Wilson. There are a number of others fighting for playing time on the line including Colin Stone and Cory Hart.

The West Jeff defense will need to step up its game to match the ability of the Roughriders offense. Buescher is encouraged by what he's seen from his defensive crew.

“We know we have to improve on that side of the ball,” he said. “We put a lot of work on that side. The young men have bought in and want to right that ship. We're taking steps in the right direction.”

The leaders defensively start with a linebacking crew of Howard, Higgins, Gatley, Swaney as well as Zach Hahn. One the ends South, Braithwaite and Carmona will all get major playing time.

The interior line will be anchored by Doran, Christz, Wilson, Lohr, Hart and Brenton Robertson.

The secondary will feature VanHook who Buescher thinks has a chance to be a special player, Graham, Boyd and Eitel.

The Roughriders will begin play in the Ohio Heritage Conference this fall, a place where the coach thinks West Jeff fits perfectly.

“I think it's great for the school and community,” he said. “It gives our kids to compete for league titles in a lot of sports. We're going to be competing with schools that are a lot more our size. It won't be easy, we're not going to go in and dominate in any sports, but we have an opportunity to have success. I think it's a win-win.”

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VOLLEYBALL

Stars align for Red Raiders

By Chris Miles
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Every so often things come together perfectly for what turns out to be a spectacular event.

Just like how the total solar eclipse which is scheduled to occur on Aug. 21, where the moon will completely cover the sun creating one of nature’s most awe inspiring sights. The London High School volleyball team appears to have everything lining up perfectly for one special season.

Years of playing young, talented players. Years of growing and learning what it takes to win all seem to have come together for London High School coach Darrell Eades’ squad here in the fall of 2017.

The Red Raiders appear to have all the necessary parts needed to make a run at a Division II Central District tournament title and beyond. Eades knows it and is ready to push his team to new heights.

“I am actually excited and blessed to have the group of kids I have,” he said. “We’ve been looking forward to this season for a while.”

London’s season ended a year ago in a D-II title game loss to Bishop Hartley. The Raiders fought hard against one of the best teams in the state only to come out with a tough 26-24, 25-16, 30-28 defeat.

“Our goal every year is to win our league first,” the coach said. “We start there. Then we’ve got an eye on getting over the hump. We’ve been the district runner-up two times in a row.

“The kids want to get back there. With this group of seniors leading the way, they want to get back there and finish the job. They want to leave their own legacy.”

The list of returning players starts with senior outside hitter Addison Conley. She was the Mid-State League Player of the Year, first team all-league, All-Central District and third team All-Ohio last season. She has verbally committed to play in college at the University of Tennessee-Martin. This will be her fourth year on the varsity squad.

Senior setter Arianna Calloway is back to run the Raiders offense and junior Malorie Colwell were All-MSL first team picks last year. Other players back include seniors Destiny Ellars (libero), Claire Wolverton (outside hitter), Taylea Achterman (outside hitter), Elizabeth Oney (middle hitter) and Ryleigh Bexfield (outside hitter).

“These kids have all bought in,” Eades said. “These kids play club, they’re all great teammates and role models to the younger girls in the program. They bring a terrific work ethic to the table. They’re on a mission.”

London will again compete in the MSL Ohio Division, Worthington Christian and West Jefferson figure to be the biggest challengers to the league title. The Raiders will also play a beefed up non-league schedule which will include Logan Elm (D-II Final Four last year), Hartley (D-II state runner-up), Hamilton Township and Kenton Ridge.

Bishop Hartley moved from D-II up to D-I. But Big Walnut will now be in D-II. Another familiar foe, Jonathan Alder is expected to be one of the best teams in D-II in the Central District.

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File photo
The London High School volleyball team finished as the Division II Central District runner-up last season.
Brutal OHC awaits young Eagles

By Chris Miles
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Just how different is varsity volleyball from junior high volleyball, members of the Madison-Plains squad are about to find out.

The Golden Eagles are going into the season with a total of eight freshmen on the roster and many more questions about just how good they can be with a team with so much inexperience.

“It's a hard one to read,” coach Mike Datz said of his team. We graduated six seniors and got eight freshmen. We're young, very young. Do I see talent? I do but a lot will depend on how well we play early. But I definitely see potential there.”

The freshmen are going from playing 13-14 year olds to playing 17-18 year olds at the varsity level. Not only will the players on the other side of the net likely be bigger and stronger. But perhaps the biggest change will be the speed in which the game is played.

The varsity game will be a major change for the younger Eagles, but Datz doesn't need the newcomers to be standouts just solid contributors.

“It's a very steep jump,” he said. “To be a hitter is really tough because of the strength and power. Where I'm looking for help in serves and the back row. If girls are going to step up it's going to be in those spots.”

The team does welcome the return of junior outside hitter Braden Mast and senior outside hitter Danielle Thornsberry, as well middle hitter Hope Fetterolf.

“Those are our three main players,” Datz said. “Our problem last year was getting them the ball. We need someone to step up and become a setter.”

Madison-Plains High School will be playing its second season in the Ohio Heritage Conference. A year ago the team suffered through some tough nights going up against stiff competition.

“At times it was brutal,” the coach said. “There are some very good girls teams in this league. The goal for us will be to go out and be competitive in every game this season.”

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Lady Riders coach “excited” about 2017

By Chris Miles
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West Jefferson volleyball coach Jeff Mere is seemingly smiling more this August, that's because most of his players are back from a year ago and the Lady Roughriders figure to be pretty good this season.

West Jefferson High School will make the move to the Ohio Heritage Conference (OHC) this fall which means a tougher road to a league championship, but with a collection of talented returnees the Riders figure they will be able to put up a good fight.

“I'm kind of excited about this season,” Mere said. “We've got most of the team back. We lost two seniors, but we should be solid and two-deep at every position.”

The team will be built around senior middle hitter Sydney Looby. She led the team in kills and blocks last year and the team in All-Mid-State League Ohio Division and All-Central District.

“It's her time to shine,” the coach said.

Also back are standouts Isabelle Fisher and Sarah Haskins. As well as Casey Chaffins, Katie Runyon and Julianna Brunicardi.

“It's still early but I think we will be stronger defensively, I also think we'll be quicker than we were a year ago. I just think we're going to a better all-around team.”

The squad will need to be better competing in the OHC. The new league features a larger number of quality teams which means more tests on a more frequent basis.

“The girls teams in the new league are very good,” Mere said. “Fairbanks is always good and West Liberty Union is usually pretty strong. The best part about being in the new league is the fact that we won't be driving to the other side of Columbus at rush hour.”

The Roughriders are working on their communication. Collectively the coaching staff would like to hear more chatter and hear the girls do a better job of talking to each other on the floor.

“I'd like us to start putting the pieces together, we need to talk more,” he said. “We have to start working better together. We've got a lot of quiet girls but hopefully they will start to communicate a little bit more.”

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Alder has many holes to fill

By Chris Miles
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There are plenty of question marks surrounding the Jonathan Alder boys soccer team as the Pioneers prepare to open the 2017 season. But coach David Lanka is encouraged by what his team has ready to step in and keep it competitive as it moves into a new conference.

The Pioneers graduated 10 seniors off of a team which reached a Division II Central District semifinal before falling 1-0 to Hamilton Township. Those departures included a pair of first team all-district center midfielders and all four starting defenders, meaning the handful of returnees will be counted on to provide more.

“With a large exit of experience and talent, we are going to be relying on our handful of returning players while expecting some younger guys who were key JV contributors from last year to step up to the challenge,” Lanka said.

“More than ever, our focus is to be a blue-collar squad that works as an 11-man unit on the field. I expect us to have some growing pains but also expect us to remain positive, hard-working and coachable. While we have lots of work to do, I also think we have a ton of potential.”

The list of key returnees includes a player who has been in goal for the last two years and another who has lead the squad in goals scored the last three years.

“We have our bookends covered with experience,” Lanka said. “(Senior) Braeden McGough will be starting his third year as our varsity keeper. In addition to this, we expect him to step up as a leader and defensive coordinator.

“On the other end of the pitch, we are returning senior Cameron Androw. While we do anticipate he will fill the net, we expect him to be the motor which drives our offense.”

Alder will also rely on returning varsity players with heavy experience in Clayton Boggs, Peyton Ernst, Ethan Gordin and Nathan Perkey.

Jonathan Alder High School is moving into the Central Buckeye Conference this fall. The team will be in the same league as Tecumseh, Bellefontaine, Springfield Shawnee, Kenton Ridge, Springfield Northwestern, St. Paris Graham, Benjamin Logan, Indian Lake and Urbana. A collection of teams Lanka admits he knows little about.

“Honestly, I do not have any experience with any of the teams in our new conference,” he said. “None of them are in the Central District. It’s definitely new territory for our program.”

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WJ girls ready for new league

By Chris Miles

Just when West Jefferson girls soccer coach Jason Phillips thought his program was getting a break, it gets hit with a harsh reality.

For anyone who thought the move from the Mid-State League Ohio Division to the Ohio Heritage Conference (OHC) was going to be an easier road to a league championship for the Lady Roughriders, they better start rethinking.

West Jefferson will have its hands full with the new foes it will see for the first time this season in the OHC. Phillips was a little surprised by the level of play of the teams in the new league, but he and his team are looking forward to the challenge.

“I thought the league we were in was tough,” the coach said. “But getting to know the new teams like West Liberty-Salem, Greenon and Fairbanks, this league will be just as tough.”

In the MSL, West Jeff routinely had to go up against the likes of Grandview, Bexley, Worthington Christian and Columbus Academy, all solid programs with top notch athletes. But the new teams in the new league appear to be just as good.

“We had a good scrimmage with Grandview the other day,” Phillips said. “But then I hear that West Liberty-Salem looked really good in beating Grandview in a scrimmage. Apparently they’re really good and so are a few others, so we’re not going into a league that’s any easier. We’re going to have to earn whatever we get.”

The Roughriders are going into the season without the team’s top scorer from the last four seasons, Sydney Gaus. She will likely be the focal point of the Lady Roughriders offensive attack this season.

The coach said the biggest thing his team needs to do is gain experience, and it can’t do that without playing. So the season will be a constant work in progress, especially playing in the Mid-State League Ohio Division, one of the youngest boys soccer leagues in the entire state.

“We’ll get better and better,” he said. “Competing in this league keeps us on our game. We have to keep getting better. We have to raise our game and level of play in order to compete in this league.”

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Young Raiders bringing energy

By Chris Miles

There’s an excitement surrounding the London High School boys soccer team this season.

Coach Dan Karl said you can’t help but be excited about the season when the players on the roster are showing up everyday with a willingness to work hard and have fun.

“We’re really excited about this team,” he said. “We’re very young, but we have a few veteran players who are helping lead the way. It’s a great feeling coming to practice every day with kids who want to work, with kids who want to get better and kids who enjoy being there.”

London a year ago struggled to a 4-14 record, but with younger players ready to give their best effort that’s a step in the direction Karl wants to take his program.

“The vibe really re-energizes us as coaches, we’re feeding off of their energy,” he said. “When you show up for practice knowing you have a whole team ready to give you everything they have, it’s a lot of fun.”

London will look to a collection of varsity returnees including junior Josh Colvin and senior Troy McFarland. The pair have taken on the responsibility of bringing along younger teammates.

“Josh is a leader on and off the field,” the coach said. “Troy has been a big leader and as a senior has acted like a coach to the younger players.”

In goal the Red Raiders will welcome the return of Jacob Broerman. He will anchor a team which has shown quite a bit of promise in the preseason.

“We have a lot more skill, more than we’ve had in the past,” Karl said. “We’re not a big, strong, physical team. But then again you don’t need to be the big and strong to be successful.”

The coach said the biggest thing his team needs to do is gain experience, and it can’t do that without playing.

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Alder girls remain dangerous

By Chris Miles
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The Jonathan Alder girls soccer team lost a large collection of talented seniors off of last year’s Division II district tournament runner-up squad. But while many would expect the Lady Pioneers to take a step back this fall, coach Matt Evans has different plans. He sees a team loaded with talent and one capable of continuing the team’s run of success.

“I am very excited about the team this year,” Evans said. “We are very young, but everyone worked hard in the off-season and there has been a lot of competition at every position all summer. All of the returning varsity sophomores played and started a lot for us last season as freshmen, so our youth has experience, but on paper, we are young. We are hoping to be consistent throughout the year with this group, but we will be better than people think.”

There are nine returning varsity letterwinners, all of them started at some point last season. Five of them were starters during the Pioneers district championship winning season in 2015. Even though the team is younger this year, expectations remain as high as ever.

“We talked about our goals the other day, but they never change,” Evans said. “Win every conference game and win a district title. We don’t talk a lot about a state title because we know there is a lot of things that have to go our way, but everyone is starting to realize that it will happen one day.”

Alder (14-5-1 last year) will be led by senior captains Hannah Headlee and Sophia Thomas.

“The two forwards will have to lead the way up front for us,” the coach said. “They are dynamic players who have come into this season with the senior hunger and they will be very tough to defend. We also have one of the best goalies in the state in Nora Squires.”

Squires has started all but four games in her career. Senior defender Peyton Mast returns to anchor the Alder defense.

“This is by far the deepest team we have ever had, so everyone will get their chance and have their moment. We will use our depth this year more than we have in the past.”

Alder’s move to the Central Buckeye Conference will mean a new set of schools to play and new challenges.

“The change in conference has really excited everyone,” Evans said. “We were 24-0 in the MOAC over the last three seasons and had some tough games and rivalries form, but we are excited for the new challenge. We know it will be a difficult task to win the CBC, but we have always competed against ourselves and try to be better the next time; so if we stay on task, we will be fine.”

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Confidence, experience key for WJ boys

By Chris Miles
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The West Jefferson boys soccer team has a different look this season.

The Roughriders are bigger, stronger and more mature. That’s what happens when your roster is filled with a collection of seniors who have been a part of the program for years. Looking the part, West Jeff will head into its first season in the Ohio Heritage Conference with a legitimate shot at competing for a championship.

“It’s a veteran team with a lot,” coach Richard Tompkins said. “We expect to do quite well this season. We expect to compete and do well in the OHC.”

This is a far cry from just a few years ago when Tompkins put a collection of undersized inexperienced kids on the field and had them compete in one of the toughest boys soccer leagues in the state, the Mid-State League Ohio Division.

The biggest difference is the experience they have and the confidence that comes with having experience,” Tompkins said. “This older bunch of guys has been together from the start. They have played against some of the best teams in state and gotten better.”

West Jefferson welcomes the return of three-time leading scorer Connor Shields. The senior was an All-MSL and All-Central District selection last year and is closing in on becoming the school’s all-time leader in goals scored.

“We look for him to again be our feature scorer,” the coach said.

To help lesson the attention Shields is likely to receive, the West Jeff coach has moved senior Thomas Farbacher, a second team All-MSL defender last year to the forward spot opposite Shields. Giving the Riders a pair of strikers capable of filling the net.

“Thomas has always been a key defensive player for us, but we moved him up front to take some pressure off of Connor,” he said. “We’re hoping it will be a nightmare for other teams.”

One would think by taking your best player off the defense and putting him on the attack, the defense would suffer, but Tompkins doesn’t see it that way. He’s got confidence in the rest of his defense.

First of all Reese Nawman returns in goal for West Jeff and Nathaniel Dersom will step into that defensive stopper role. Matt Stultz, a second team All-MSL player a year ago, will anchor the team through the midfield.

The biggest issue with relying on a large number of seniors to lead the way, is that it makes it hard for younger players to get on the field and show what they’re capable of doing. Tompkins said he will try his best to continue to build the Roughriders program.

“We have 19-20 kids in the program right now, having eight or nine guys on the bench is hard,” he said. “But we’ll do what we can. We want those younger guys to continue to get better because it’ll be their turn soon.”

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The high school golf season is perhaps the busiest season of all the sports seasons at the prep level. A few days of tryouts and then a steady stream of matches on a daily basis. It’s not uncommon for golf teams to be playing four to five times a week. The season which starts at the beginning of August in sweltering heat and continues well into the cool days of October.

Area boys teams are working hard, keeping busy and building for the postseason.

Jonathan Alder

The Pioneers have the look of a team capable of making noise in the postseason this fall. With a collection of experienced returnees, coach Mitch Koester has plenty of reasons to be optimistic.

“This year’s team should be very solid,” Koester said. “We have five of our top six golfers returning including our top four off of last year’s team. We look for big things this year. We look to build on our MOAC title from last year and improve upon our fourth place finish in sectionals last fall.”

Alder will welcome the return of seniors Joey Petrella and Zach Otto. A strong sophomore class led by Hayden Mitchell, Mychal McKelvey and Tyler Hilbert are all back. They all earned varsity letters last year.

The Pioneers will compete in the Central Buckeye Conference this fall for the first time. That change will be a challenge for Alder, but Koester’s team should be prepared.

“It gives us new courses to play that we haven’t seen before, but we took the returning letterwinners to play all of these courses throughout the summer, so we should be prepared when we show up for those matches,” Koester said. “The CBC should be more competitive and there are some very solid programs in the league.

“Last year, Springfield Shawnee and Bellefontaine were really solid and they both have some good players coming back.”

Madison-Plains

The Golden Eagles have a few returnees and a collection of older veterans on the squad this season.

The roster includes varsity returnees Ian Bowshier and Clay Gear. Both juniors were members of the Madison-Plains High School team that finished fourth at last year’s D-II sectional tournament and start the season at the top of the order. Also back this
Boys Golf

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season is Joseph Siler.

Joining the mix are freshmen Adyn Gammell, Gabe Garrison and Spencer Baker.

Madison-Plains High School should challenge for the Ohio Heritage Conference title this fall.

London

The Red Raiders are still young, but the team is already way ahead of where it finished a year ago.

In its first match of the season London High School fired a round which was 15 strokes better than its best mark last season. And with just one senior on the roster, the team has plenty of growing still to do.

“We return six or seven guys, but we still only have one senior and one junior so we’re still pretty young,” coach Dillan Shumaker said. “We’re really happy with the progress these guys have made.”

Senior Joseph Johnson and junior Andy Fullmer are the lone upperclassmen who return. Also back are sophomore Nick Berchtold and Drew Herman. Freshman Cade Smith has come and established himself as one of the top players on the team. Sophomore Grant Carpenter is on the team for the first time this fall.

London High School is competing in the Mid-State League one of the toughest golf leagues in the state. But the coach knows that even though competing in the league is tough, his players are being challenged constantly.

“It’s bittersweet, it stinks to have to go up against Bexley, Columbus Academy, Grandview and Worthington Christian on a regular basis but it gives you a good idea of where you are and where you want to get to,” the coach said. “It’s a good measuring stick.

“If our guys beat any of those kids they know they’ve played well.”

West Jefferson

A new league has the golfers at West Jeff looking forward to the season.

Getting out of the MSL Ohio Division and into a new league (Ohio Heritage Conference) will likely be a liberating experience for the Roughriders.

“We should be more competitive in the OHC than were in the MSL,” coach Bob Hunter said. “We need numbers 3-6 to be able to deliver.”

Junior Matt McClish, a district qualifier last year, Joe Thompson another junior are expected to be the team’s top two players. Ethan Hoenie (junior), Kyle Howard (sophomore) and Brianna Crigger (sophomore) also return.

Newcomers Cade Brintlinger, Scottie Hunter and Brendon King are all three juniors. The lone freshman is Isabel Swindal who has some experience playing at National Road. There are no seniors on the Roughriders roster.

“The new league will give our kids a chance to gain all-league honors. Whereas the MSL was dominated by state powers Bexley and Academy, along with Worthington Christian and Grandview. The teams in the OHC are not nearly as deep as those teams. Southeastern has a state qualifier returning. Mechanicsburg, Fairbanks, Triad and Northeastern are also very good.

“The kids on our team have worked harder this off-season more than any team I’ve had. They all get along very well and are all a joy to coach.”

Reach Chris Miles at 740-852-1616, ext. 1618 or via Twitter @MadPressSports.

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Tennis teams strong in numbers

By Chris Miles

Jonathan Alder tennis coach Brett Fuller and his talented collection of returnees are looking forward to the 2017 season.

With a team loaded with veterans coming off a strong season, you can easily understand why there’s such an excitement.

“I like the commitment of this team so far in practice,” the coach said. “The number of girls that work hard over the winter with private lessons and group lessons that are coming out here to play. I know talking with the girls we are super excited to get the season started.”

There are a total of eight returning players back including senior Mikayla Holland. Holland was undefeated in the regular season a year ago at second singles. She’ll slide over into the coveted No. 1 singles slot. Sydney Winslow and Madalyn Grove will play No. 2 and No. 3 singles. The combo of Madison Vance and Mary Kate Hipp will help the Pioneers doubles teams.

“Mikayla will play the lead role on this team,” Fuller said. “The other girls really look up to her after the season she had last year. We are very fortunate in that I catch all the returning players helping out the incoming freshmen and work with them every day to try and get them a good start to the season.”

Alder will start its first season as a member of the Central Buckeye Conference, a league the coach admits that he doesn’t know a whole lot about.

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“I’m not sure what to think of the new league,” Fuller said. “We have played a couple of teams last year and I think it will be very competitive. I think the seniors of this team will miss playing those girls we played for the last four years. I think the new league will allow us to play more league teams which is always an advantage.”

London

There’s been an influx of players onto the Red Raiders tennis squad this fall.

“It’s the largest we’ve ever had, we’ve got an army,” coach Jason Clark said. “Most are first-year players, but it’s nice to have so many of them out.”

With right around 15 kids a year ago that number has ballooned to 25, giving the Raiders many more options.

“In order to determine who plays where, the coach puts together a bracket and his players play a series one set matches to determine playing order.

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The coach’s daughter Alexis Clark, a senior earned her way to the coveted No. 1 singles slot.

“Our challenge day is Friday and kids can earn their way into the lineup, nothing is given,” the coach said of challenging for playing time.

The Raiders remain in the tennis-tough Mid-State League, where some of the best teams in Central Ohio reside.

“We are a very tennis-strong league,” Clark said. “My girls come in with somewhat of a deficit. Many don’t actually pick up a racquet until their freshman year in high school. But we do our best to teach them and they learn to battle and hold their own.”

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