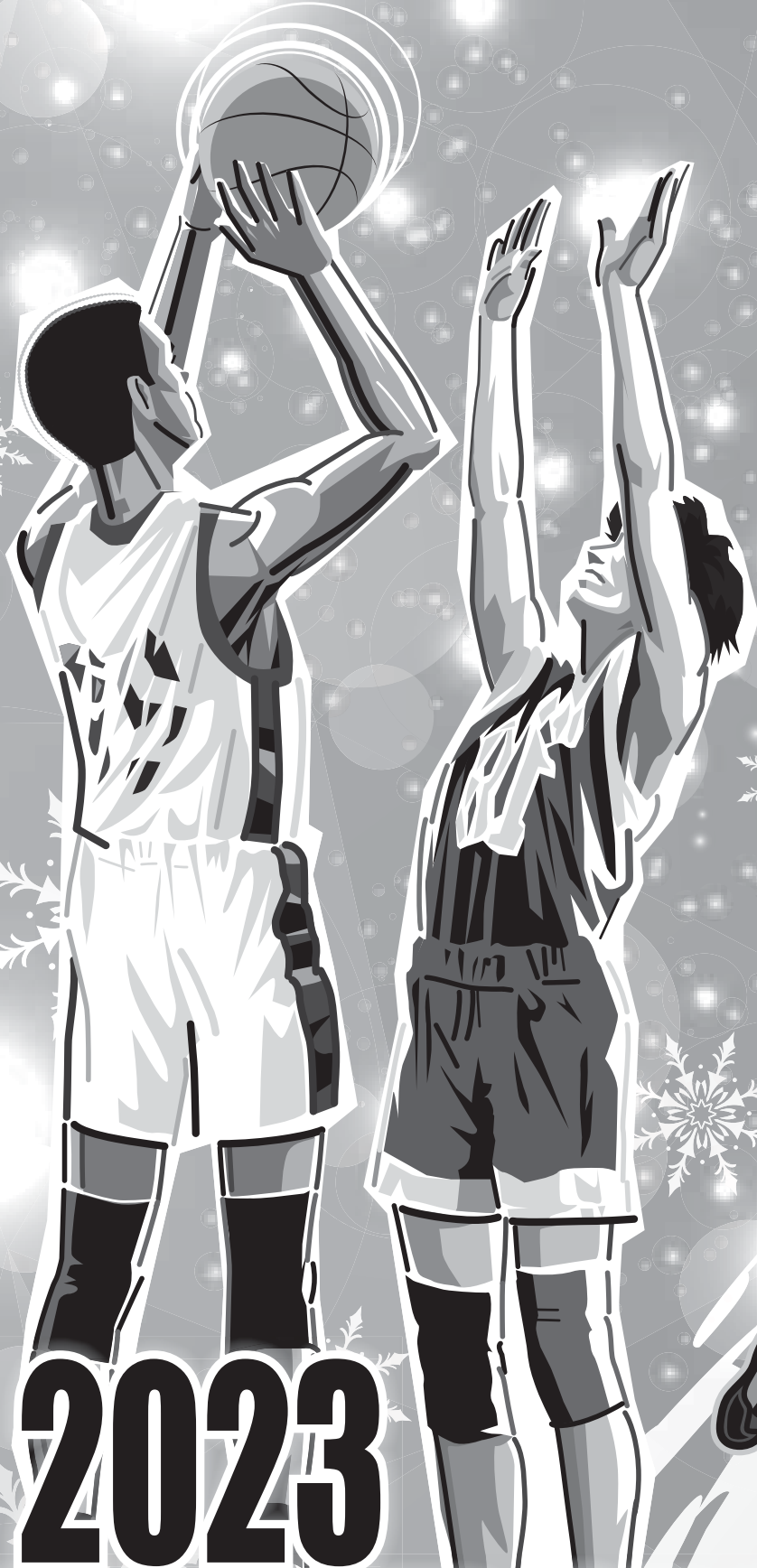




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Bluffton, Indiana



2023

WINTER SPORTS PREVIEW

## BOYS' BASKETBALL



Members of the Southern Wells boys' basketball team are from left to right: Manager Alaina Nussbaumer, Landon Johnsson, Andrew Aker, Caleb Johnson, Evan Pennington, and manager Hallie Mounsey. Second row, assistant coach Flava Sirk, assistant coach Dale Miller, Trey Slusher, Perrin Gates, Joshua Aulbach, CJ Reber, Chandler Oswald, Head coach Joel Roush, and assistant coach Craig Oswald.

# Oswalt, Pennington headline Raiders' guard-heavy unit

By RYAN WALKER

Even with a 6-16 record, the Southern Wells boys had some bright moments and continued to get better as the year rolled on.

A five-point win at Bluffton in the middle of a three-game win streak was perhaps the highlight of the season that had some down moments as well.

But the fact of the matter is that the Raiders were on the brink of finishing alone in fifth place in the ACAC. They nearly beat the No. 2 team in the conference in Jay County, losing by three and falling to South Adams by four.

Fifth might not be that big of a deal for others, but Southern Wells hasn't had three wins in the ACAC since the 2013 season.

Now, they'll be returning their two leading scorers from last year with, Chandler Oswald (15.5 points per game) and Evan Pennington (9.4 ppg).

The two are going to have to step up more than just the score sheet, losing four impact seniors from last year. Second-year head coach Joel Roush is pushing for them to take the reins of the program.

"Chandler and Evan are our hardest workers," Roush said. "They have both really become more complete players this off-season. I am looking for leadership from them this year. They have led through their effort, attendance, and improvement. The next step is for them to lead our younger play-

ers."

Oswalt and Penning won't be alone, as the Raiders have seniors with varsity experience, with Perrin Gates and Andrew Aker also on the floor with them. Roush included them as players who will have increased roles.

Aker will serve as a wing player that brings speed to Southern Wells' offense, while Gates will pair with Quinton Mullins down low.

An unfamiliar face that will also get increased roles on varsity is guard CJ Reber, according to Roush. Both will be relatively new to the varsity level but will need to be key parts in replacing playing guard Kedrik Sonnigsen and guards Jenson Nusbaumer and

Nick Lozoya.

The only two pieces to the puzzle Roush will need to figure out is who will take over at point guard and rebounding.

Roush admitted that the team isn't tall, and they'll need to rebound as a unit if they want to improve.

The team struggled to get the ball back off the glass throughout the season, and its kryptonite was against taller teams like Woodlan and Adams Central.

On the flip side, Southern Wells will be strong in the backcourt and have plenty of depth.

"They say that in high school, basketball teams win with guards," Roush said. "I think we have a really good set of those. ... We

will have good guard play. That is going to be one of our strengths. We will not be big. We will need to rebound as a team if we are going to be successful."

The new starters and varsity guys will need to learn their identity quickly, as the first conference game is the second game of the season against Adams Central. Bluffton isn't far behind for an opportunity to knock off the Tigers.

If Southern Wells can get off to a nice start, they'll be in the mix to get to that three-win mark in the ACAC and fight for third place or better.

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# Teagle leads Tigers in first year as head coach

By RYAN WALKER

The Bluffton boys' basketball team has already faced some adversity during the offseason with coaching changes.

Former head coach Karl Grau announced that he would be stepping down after a 2-20 season with the Tigers.

In response, Bluffton hired Heritage's coach, Adam Gray, but that has since changed after he was arrested in Allen County for reportedly stealing money from his Heritage team.

While coaching searches can be an exciting and unprecedented time for the players, what the Bluffton athletic administration couldn't predict is what would happen with Gray, and they were forced to restart the hiring process. Luckily, around the same time, Craig Teagle stepped down from a newly accepted position at New Albany to come coach the Tigers.

The stroke of luck for both parties now gives Bluffton basketball its new face in Teagle, who has won 443 games in 31 seasons worth at Huntington North, Jay County, and Caston.

Because the football team went far in the postseason, Teagle has had limited time with his players and is doing what he can with what he's got.

"Pre-season workouts have been going pretty well," Teagle

said. "We are just concentrating on fundamentals and skills necessary to execute our basketball system. ... I have enjoyed the players we have been working with. The players seem eager to learn and willing to adapt to a new coach and style of play."

Of the projected returning cast, the Tigers will be bringing back several key members from last season.

Senior forward Tucker Jenkins was the top returning point scorer, averaging over 16 points per game. The big man was a double-double threat on a nightly basis, snagging eight rebounds per game, and will be a go-to option for the Tigers again this year.

Bluffton will likely be the strongest in their postgame with Jenkins pairing with Hunter Wenger on the block. Wenger is the second highest scorer for the Tigers.

The question will be guard play for the Tigers, as they lost point guard Sam Baumgartner by graduation and Kaden Grau, who followed his father to Westview. Grau added 9.6 points per game and was a scoring threat from all over the floor.

Top candidates to replace the two are seniors Eli Garrett and Andrew Hunt, along with sophomore AJ Streveler.

Hunt and Streveler were injured

for several games last season and are looking to bounce back for more production this year. Streveler averaged around 4.5 points a night, while Hunt added nearly four, but also with four rebounds.

For Teagle, the most important part is teaching the players his philosophy and getting them to have belief in the program. Teagle wants to force teams to shoot by keeping them out of the paint, man-to-man defense, and running a motion offense.

"Our expectations and goals this year are to teach our system and get buy-in from the players," Teagle said. "We hope that they begin understanding our fundamentals, principles, and concepts. We hope that during the second half of the season, we will be able to execute at a level that will allow us to compete with our opponents."

In the ACAC last year, the top four teams — in order, Adams Central, Jay County, Heritage, and Woodlan — separated themselves with four or more wins in the conference. The bottom three had a three-way tie with South Adams, Bluffton and Southern Wells.

The Tigers will be looking to improve the one win in the conference.

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Bluffton's Tucker Jenkins goes up for a shot against Manchester last season at the Tiger Den. (Photo by Glen Werling)



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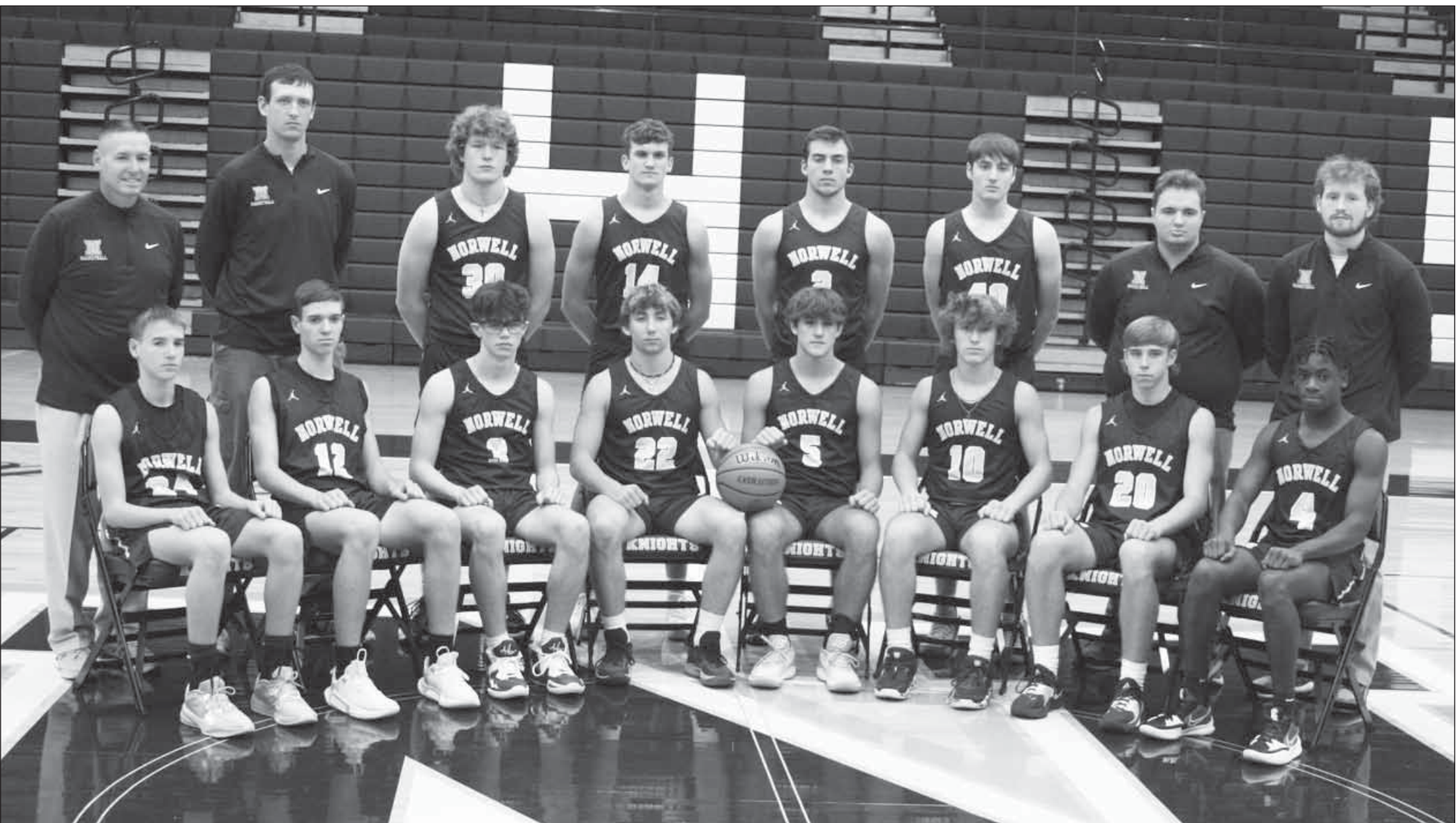
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## BOYS' BASKETBALL



Members of the Norwell boys' basketball team are from left to right: Front row, Nick McBride, Adam McBride, Kaden Petry, Cohen Bailey, Brady Smith, Kayden Quintanilla, Owen Wallace, Gary Riley. Back row, Head coach Mike McBride, assistant coach Dylan Miller, Ashton Federspiel, Trace Moser, Cade Shelton, Ryne Thornton, assistant coach Jacob Collins, and assistant coach Drew Federspiel.

# Knights looking to patch senior gap from last year

By RYAN WALKER

Norwell's boys' basketball team had a sour end to an otherwise very successful season in 2022-23.

The Knights won another Northeast 8 conference title, posted a 22-4 record, and held a top-5 ranking for the majority of the season in 3A. But in the sectional championship, it was an unranked Peru Tigers team that stunned them on its home court to end the season.

That group was senior-heavy, losing seven players with key minutes due to graduation. Some of the key losses were Luke McBride, — who is currently playing significant minutes for Bethel University as a freshman, — as well

as Jake Parker, Lleyton Bailey, and Brody Bolyn.

Even though the team lost that many seniors, head coach Mike McBride will have an older squad this year.

"We will certainly have a different make-up this year," McBride said. "We graduated a lot of quality players. We have some very good pieces back, and we will add some new guys that have had good success at the JV level."

The Knights will have two players who bring back experience and good minutes at both positions. Cohen Bailey will be the top returner on the point sheet as a quick guard who can take it to the rack, and also shoot the three-ball.

Forward Ashton Federspiel will contribute on the block and have an increased role.

The two have two seasons under their belt on varsity and McBride says they're ready for the next step after playing in many big games in their tenure.

"We expect both of them to perform at a high level for us this season," McBride said.

Other key members of the team are unfamiliar faces who sat out a season of basketball. Senior forwards Cade Shelton and Trace Moser will help establish a front-court for the Knights, and perhaps establish an identity for the team.

"We feel we should have a strong inside game this season,

and we feel like we can be a really good rebounding team," McBride said. "We like the pieces that we have, and now we have to learn how to work together and play our roles."

With many more holes to fill, McBride will be counting on the top performers on junior varsity last season to continue right away. Adam McBride, Ayden Quintanilla, and Owen Wallis were all top guys on the roster and will need to learn the ropes quickly to help the Knights compete.

Considering the youth of the backcourt, Norwell might go through some growing pains in a tough schedule to begin the season. Carroll, Oak Hill, and Black-

hawk are all within the first few games in the season and will test the new varsity players.

To compete with that, McBride has a list of things to work on early.

"Taking care of the basketball, taking great shots, and making free throws will be very important offensively," McBride said. "Keeping the ball out of the paint, contesting shots, and controlling the boards will be very important defensively."

In the Northeast 8, Columbia City, New Haven, and Leo are the top candidates to try and dethrone Norwell.

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## GIRLS' BASKETBALL

## Knights look forward to highly anticipated girls season

By RYAN WALKER

Yet again last year, Norwell girls basketball proved why it's one of the best programs in the state with a 21-4 record and sectional championship.

Four of the five in the starting lineup received all-conference awards, along with a freshman player on the bench to finish in second place in the Northeast 8 Conference.

But the most impressive part to Eric Thornton's 27th team is that every single player will return to the roster. That's right, zero seniors from last year.

Even though the Knights will bring back everyone, each spot on the varsity roster is not guaranteed and won't look exactly the same.

"It's certainly a unique situation where we return everyone," Thornton said. "However, our rotation is going to change. With the development of returning varsity players as well as those from an undefeated JV team, we can't stay the same. It's a good problem to have."

The only part of the team that won't change are the three players that are all committed to play at the collegiate level. According to Thornton, that's the first time he's ever had that

many in the same senior class.

The headliner is Kennedy Fuelling, who will be heading to Marian University in Indianapolis. The Marian Knights are a top-tier program in the powerful Crossroads League and at the national level.

The sharpshooting senior was a first-team all-conference award winner, and led the Knights in scoring with over 20 points per contest. She shot over 40 percent from deep, and tallied over three steals a game. She also eclipsed the 1,000 point mark last year.

The second first teamer in the NE8 was St. Francis signee Makenzie Fuess. Also a sharpshooter, Fuess is the perfect compliment to Fuelling, as she shot 36 percent from beyond the arc and tallied 16 points a game. She's quick and not afraid to shoot the rock.

The final commit is Dekota Hubble, who will join Huntington University's roster next season. The senior is the main forward as she hit the second-team all-NE8 last year with 5.3 rebounds per game and was the leading shot blocker by far for the Knights.

"We've never had three college commits in the same class," Thornton said. "That's a testament to the



Members of the Norwell girls' basketball team are from left to right: Front row, Annabelle Johnson, Addison Norris, Jada Dale, Kennedy Fuelling, Lilly Norris, Ali Riley, and Makenzie Fuess. Back row, assistant coach Mandy Kopp, Ryland Graft, Haley Green, Dekota Hubble, Vanessa Rosswurm, Ashley Waldman, head coach Eric Thornton, and assistant coach Jason Frisch.

commitment and leadership of Dekota, Kennedy, and Makenzie. They have an incredible impact on our team and are great examples for our younger players."

Another player to watch for is Vanessa Rosswurm. The sophomore was honorable mention in the conference and can do it all for the Knights. She was primarily at her best as a defender, while also appearing on the scoresheet some nights, and even showed flashes

of some range in her jump shot.

The goal this season is clear — win the NE8 and compete for a state championship. Norwell has the roster to do so.

Even with the three college commitments on the team, the Knights aren't technically favored to win the NE8.

Columbia City, who entered the year at No. 10 in the IBCA poll (Norwell picked up receiving votes). The Eagles got the best of

the Knights last year in a 16-point win led by Butler commit Addison Baxter.

That game and the season-ending loss to Hamilton Heights in the regional final gives a chance to improve for this season.

Thornton mentioned the regional game when talking about perhaps the biggest area to improve this season — toughness.

"The four-point loss in the regional to end our season sticks with us and is a daily reminder in how much

tougher we need to be in those moments," Thornton said. "We didn't play with the toughness needed to advance."

Norwell will certainly be tested this season for that toughness. The schedule features 10 teams in the pre-season poll, including No. 8 Homestead, No. 9 Snider, No. 10 Columbia City, No. 12 Lawrence North, No. 13 Northrop and No. 19 Warsaw. There's also a potential to face No. 3 Noblesville in the Holiday Tournament.

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## GIRLS' BASKETBALL



Members of the Southern Wells girls' basketball team are from left to right: Front row, Erika Beavans, Gracie Reeves, Kyah Thomas, Kenzie Paxson, Bre Leidig, Kaylee Coffel, Aubrey Meyer, and Karlee Warner. Back row, assistant coach Ross Palmer, Ella Lahr, Ashlie Needler, Collena Reeves, head coach Jessica Killingbeck, assistant coach Jada Johnson, and assistant coach Alaina Culberson.

## Raiders replace key talent, but not backing down in girls hoops

By RYAN WALKER

Last year, Southern Wells had some up-and-down moments throughout its best season since 2018, posting an 8-15 record.

That Raider squad was led by a handful of seniors that propelled the ship on most nights but have now graduated.

The best of the bunch was Avah Miner, the team's leading scorer and facilitator (7.1 ppg). Other key departures were Hailey Duncan, Zoe Needler, and Faith Blair.

This year begins a new challenge for seventh-year head coach Jessica Killingbeck to string together a varsity roster full of young inexperienced players. But despite a lack of varsity minutes, she's intrigued with what she's seen so far in the preseason.

"(Our) off-season workouts went very well," Killingbeck said. "Our numbers were fantastic, and we had a lot of buy-in. Our practices so far have been very competitive, and kids are fighting for their spots, which has been a lot of fun to watch."

One thing is for sure — the front court is set. Ashlie Needler returns as the team's top scorer (6.8 ppg) and rebounder (8.2 rpg) from last season, and will be paired up with Kenzie Paxson on the block. The two forwards will be the most experienced position group on the team.

In the sectional semi-final, Needler posted a double-double with 12 points and 11 rebounds. The junior now has an opportunity to be the go-to on the offensive end.

The two combine height and strength

down low that will be the bread and butter of the Raiders' on both ends of the floor.

"Ashlie will be a force for us on the floor throughout the year, and with her and Kenzie getting to play together, it makes for a tough matchup," Killingbeck said.

The top returning guard for Killingbeck's unit will be Collena Reeves. Other key returners who will get a promotion of minutes are Bre Leidig and Gracie Reeves.

There is no question Southern Wells might go through some growing pains with the loss of on and off-the-floor leadership, especially early. However, Killingbeck's intense and active coaching style mixed with basketball intelligence creates a competitive environment for a young team. She knows that she will get the best out of her players and believes it's their most prominent characteristic.

"The best potential trait this group has is how competitive they are," Killingbeck said. "They don't feel sorry for each other in practice when they push, and they hold each other accountable to do the little things right. ... As far as weakness goes, experience will be the biggest thing that affects us, but that will get better as the season goes on."

Last year, the Raiders went winless in the tough ACAC. Expect Jay County, South Adams, and Bluffton to be near the top this season.

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## GIRLS' BASKETBALL

# Curtis, returning cast to lead Tigers

By RYAN WALKER

Toward the end of last season, Bluffton's girls' basketball team seemed to find its stroke with three straight wins in the regular season.

The Tigers finished the year with an even 11-11 record while posting a 2-4 record in the conference.

But that same team that caught fire is now poised for bigger and better things to come, returning 92 percent of the team scoring production back.

The only difference will be a big one – the head coach. Eric Mounsey stepped down earlier in the summer, and Bluffton hired Doug Curtis to replace him.

Curtis was brought in with 26 years of experience at Angola, DeKalb, Adams Central, and Northrop, tallying 264 wins.

His most recent stop with the Jets was two years ago where he went 9-13.

Part of what attracted him to Bluffton was the returning cast and the roster he is taking over,

"I think we can be very successful," Curtis said. "They are athletic, we have them playing aggressive, and they are coachable, which should lead to

success on the court this winter. One reason I was interested in the job was because of lots of experienced returners."

Two of the primary contributors are senior Haley Gibson and junior Maryn Schreiber, who were both leading scorers from last season.

Gibson, a guard, will get the most time with the ball as she averaged 11.8 points per game and led the team in assists. She also plays scrappy defense with a pair of steals per game and will get plenty of minutes.

Schreiber was and will be a double-double threat every night, scoring 8.5 points per game and seven rebounds. The tall forward is a force down low and tough to shoot around, as she also had around a block per contest.

The two will lead the way on Curtis' philosophy, in which he preaches an aggressive style and uses the team's athleticism and speed to their advantage.

"I am really expecting a great defensive group as they are athletic and aggressive," Curtis said. "That should lead to some quicker offensive basketball with transition and continued defensive ball



Members of the Bluffton girls' basketball team are from left to right: Front row, Marly Drayer, Tressa Renner, Konley Ault, Isabella Stout, Cayah King, and Haley Gibson. Back row, assistant coach Bowman, assistant coach Abby Ault, Madyson Sonnigsen, Gina Eisenhut, Maryn Schreiber, manager Rori Drayer, and head coach Doug Curtis.

pressure."

A few other members to keep an eye out for are Isabella Stout and Konley Ault.

With attention focused on Gibson and Schreiber, Stout and Ault will be key pieces to the scoring puzzle when needed. The two averaged over 10 combined points last season.

Stout shot 41 percent from the field and 40 percent from deep (6-15 3-pt).

Expect some more shots from her this season.

Ault started to find a rhythm toward the end of her freshmen campaign last year, including a 10-point game against Whitko.

An interesting addition to the Tigers' team this year will be Madyson Sonnigsen, a transfer from Norwell.

As a freshman, Sonnigsen played a role off the bench for a top-three

Knights team that won a sectional championship in 3A. She will play all over the court and be a nice plug-in for Curtis.

"Madyson Sonnigsen will be a contributor right away on varsity," Curtis said. "She has the ability to play multiple positions for us."

In the conference, the Tigers should compete with a handful of good competition in a tough ACAC.

The defending champion, Jay County Patriots (23-2, 8-0 ACAC), lost Renna Schwieterman, a freshman now at Purdue Fort Wayne, along with other seniors. They should still be a top contender.

Woodlan lost the majority of its starters, and South Adams lost some too. The Tigers are trending up, but the conference is always good from top to bottom.

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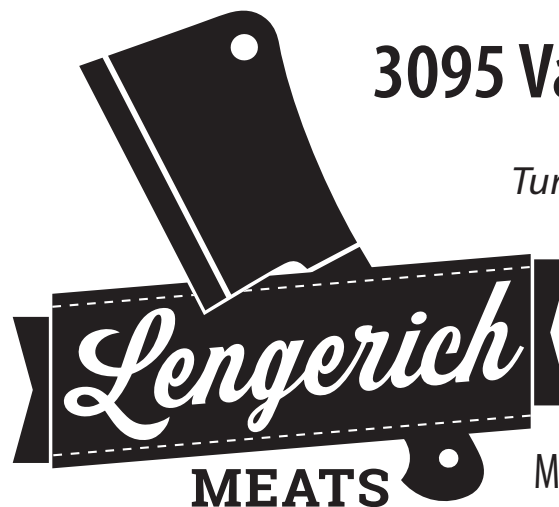
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**BOYS' / GIRLS' SWIMMING/DIVING**

# Younger group to lead Knights to NE8, sectional title



The Norwell Knights' boys' swimming team poses with the sectional championship trophy moments after receiving it Tuesday afternoon at Jay County High School. (Photo by Ryan Walker)

By RYAN WALKER

The boys' team for Norwell did just about everything it wanted to accomplish last season.

The Knights earned back-to-back trophies in the Northeast 8 Conference and the sectional, while sending four events to the state finals.

But the Knights face a new challenge this season — replacing most of the state qualifiers and several high-impact seniors.

This year we have a very young team," second-year head coach Stephanie Scott said. "This will definitely be a different-looking team this year than last year. Over half the team is underclassmen, and we have several young swimmers who have a lot of potential with some stroke/technique work and refinement."

Of the state competitors, Norwell will need to replace Mikey Reidenbach in the 50 and the 100-yard freestyle, Samuel Peterson in the 100-yard butterfly, and Emerson Graft in both the 200 and 400-yard freestyle relay. The Knights also lost Reece Lobsiger, who finished second in the sectional 100 back-

stroke and butterfly races.

Of the returners, Rodrigo Segovia (freestyle) is the only one with state-qualifying experience on the relay teams. Scott also mentions Parker McCartney (breaststroke), Kale Meredith (medley, IM, breaststroke), Trenton Singleton (breaststroke, IM), and Ethan Williamson (freestyle) as the leaders of the bunch.

The rest of the group is relatively small, with half the team being freshmen and the vast majority underclassmen.

"The goal this year is to rebuild," Scott said. "We gained several Freshmen that we have seen improvement in already (in the preseason) and are excited to see what they will bring to the table this year. We also have several members of the team returning that are stepping up and filling the role as team leaders both in and out of the pool."

Even with the high graduation numbers, Norwell should compete at both the sectional and NE8 levels. Scott expects Bluffton, Delta, Oak Hill, Columbia City and Huntington North.

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## Knight girls poised for big things in 2023-24

By RYAN WALKER

Last season, first-year head coach Stephanie Scott led both the Norwell girls' and boys' swim teams to their second straight Northeast Conference Championship.

The girls won by over 100 team points in front of Columbia City on a team that had just two seniors.

Five of the members (two events) placed first in the sectional, earning their spot at the state meet at IUPUI. Senior Emma Page clinched in the 200-yard freestyle, while the team of Ella Krug, Emerson Meredith, Jillian Melcher, and Haleigh Reinhard made it in the 200-yard medley relay.

All four swimmers from the medley relay squad are back, along with the rest of the bunch, and are poised for bigger and better things.

With a familiar roster back in the pool and additions of a big freshmen class, the Knights are ready to get back to competition and take it to the next level.

"We are very excited heading into this

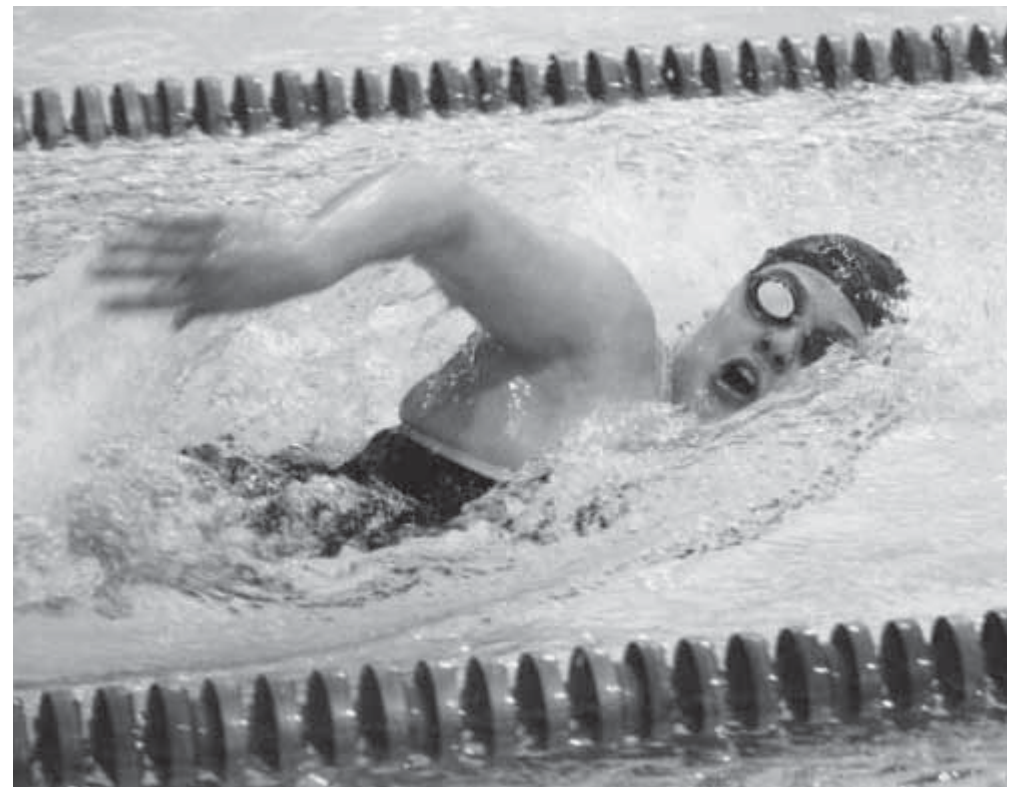
year," Scott said. "The girls are picking right up where they left off last year, putting time both in and out of the pool and looking great so far. We added several freshmen to our roster who are a great addition to our existing group of girls."

The only blemish on a successful season was a second-place finish in the sectional. The Knights finished just 15 points behind a strong Delta Eagles team, who sent six events to the state finals. The Eagles and Jay County Patriots are expected to come out strong again this year.

Scott also mentioned Columbia City and Huntington North as teams to watch out for in the conference.

Outside of the state qualifier, the top events to watch out for Norwell are: Krug in the 200-yard IM, the 400-yard freestyle relay, Melcher in the 50-yard freestyle and the 100-yard backstroke, Meredith in the 100-yard freestyle and Cassie Coyne in the 500-yard freestyle.

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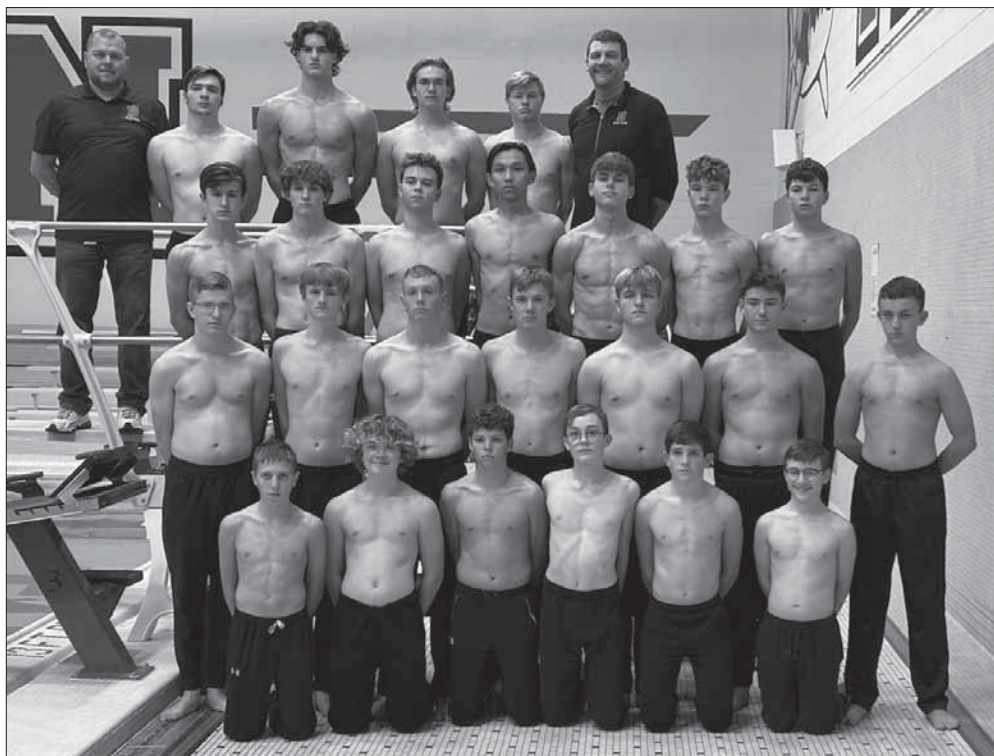


Norwell's Jillian Melcher swims in the 100-yard freestyle event Monday night at home. This was the Knights' final meet before girls sectionals Thursday and Saturday (Photos by Ryan Walker)



**BOYS' / GIRLS' SWIMMING/DIVING**

# Tigersharks aiming for decade of ACAC dominance



Members of the Bluffton boys' swim team are from left to right: Front row Clayton Brubaker, Lincoln Rodgers, Graham Linderwell, Cullen Hale, Evan Klopfenstein, and Silas Troyer. Second row, Grant Reifsteck, Timothy Lanning, Wes Frettinger, Jackson Meyer, Jacob Ribich, Noah Brooks, and Braden Lemler. Third row, Blake Reinhard, Athan King, Isaac Wheeler, Alex Reimberdyev, Anthony Hartman, Rhett Gerber, and Griffin Linderwell. Fourth row, assistant coach Steve Linderwell, Ashton Arnett, Elija Robles, Dalton Rodgers, Jonah Cole, and Head Coach Justin Uptgraft.

## Tigersharks building in 2023-24

By RYAN WALKER

It was a rebuilding season for the Bluffton girls' swim team last year, but they still competed well despite low numbers.

The Tigersharks finished third in the ACAC and ninth out of 12 teams in the sectional while still picking up some regular-season wins as well.

This season, head coach Hunter Cunningham will have the challenge of replacing seniors who took up the majority of sectional qualifying spots.

"We will be facing the same problem we faced last season: a small team," Cunningham said. "I am hopeful that these girls will push themselves individually, and everyone will see their success at conference and sectionals."

The Tigersharks have eight on the roster for now, with two others injured. Due to the low numbers, there will be a lot of points left empty for other teams to take, thus hard to compete on the scoreboard.

The team will also be bringing in many new faces that will contribute to the rebuild down the road. Half of the group will be freshmen – Kierstynn Reed, Anna Zurcher,

Emily Hansen and Ellie Coyne.

Of the returning members, Zoey Schmidt will be the key part to the squad. The senior finished in the top-8 (eighth) in the 500-yard freestyle race.

Lucia Corkwell also will be a top returner.

Corkwell competed in the 200-yard freestyle relay team and was in the finals for the sectional last year.

Cunningham mentioned that considering the numbers, her goal is to train each swimmer as an individual in their best races. Since the sectional is based on how individuals do, the team can focus on their own events.

"With having such a small team this year, my focus is on individual swims," Cunningham said. "I am hoping to push these girls individually and would love to see all of them compete on finals day at sectionals."

In the ACAC, Jay County should be the favorite again to win. The sectional will be tough with the Patriots, Norwell Knights, and defending champion Delta Eagles in the same pool.

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By RYAN WALKER

The Bluffton boys' swimming team had yet another solid season in the swimming pool last year.

The Tigersharks will be going toward a decade of dominance this season, wrapping up their ninth ACAC title in a row in 2023. Their efforts in the sectional had them in third place with 263 team points, just shy of Delta and Norwell.

Head coach Justin Uptgraft is now entering his sixth season and will be faced with replacing four sectional finalists this year. But even last year, he had a young group that he was dealt and still had a successful year.

"The only way we can bring home No. 10 is to keep doing what we have been doing for a decade: outwork other teams in practice," Uptgraft said.

The Tigersharks are welcoming 13 freshmen out of the 25 swimmers on the roster. During the course of last year, Uptgraft admitted that his team matured much faster than he anticipated, and they bought in to working hard in practice.

Of the top senior returnees, Dalton Rodgers (freestyle events and backstroke), Elija Robles (medley, diving, and breast-

stroke), and Ashton Arnett (butterfly and backstroke) headline past sectional qualifiers. Sophomores Noah Brooks (backstroke and freestyle) and Isaac Wheeler (IM and freestyle) also made some noise in the sectional.

Uptgraft's key to this season will be ramping up the newbies in practice, as they'll need to start plugging in events for team points right away.

"There is a lot of talent there, so my main focus will be to speed up the learning curve for them because they have to contribute for us to be successful," Uptgraft said.

Other potential contributors Uptgraft mentioned are Braden Lemler, Wes Frettinger, and Griffin Linderwell.

The goals this year for the Tigersharks are extended to moving up a spot or two in the sectional, while also marking their calendars on Dec. 19, when they host Norwell, hoping for revenge.

In the ACAC, expect Bluffton to be at the top again. In the sectional, Delta, Norwell, Bluffton, Muncie Burris and Muncie Central should be contenders.

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## BLUFFTON BOYS/GIRLS SWIMMING/DIVING

Nov. 17 Huntington North (girls)	5:30 pm	Jan. 21 Wayne	5:30 pm
Dec. 1 Jay County	5:30 pm	Jan. 22 at ACAC Invite	5 pm
Dec. 3 Muncie Burris	5:30 pm	Jan. 23 at ACAC Invite	9 am
Dec. 8 Adams Central	5:30 pm	Jan. 26 at Norwell	5:30 pm
Dec. 10 Blackford	5:30 pm	Jan. 28 at Belmont	5:30 pm
Dec. 15 Fort Recovery	5:30 pm	Feb. 4 at Girls Sectional at Jay County	5:30 pm
Dec. 29 at Belmont	2 pm	Feb. 6 at Girls Sectional at Jay County	1 pm
Jan. 5 at Bishop Luers	5:30 pm	Feb. 9 at Huntington North (boys)	5:30 pm
Jan. 7 at South Adams	5:30 pm	Feb. 18 Boys Sectional at Jay County	5:30 pm
Jan. 8 at Jay County Invite	6 pm	Feb. 20 Boys Sectional at Jay County	1 pm
Jan. 9 at Jay County Invite	9 am		
Jan. 12 at Marion	5:30 pm		
Jan. 14 Manchester	5:30 pm		

## WRESTLING

# Knights look for big year after first NE8 title in school history



Members of the Norwell wrestling team are from left to right: Front row, Jake Gruss, Jason Pough, Hunter Baumann, Connor Fojtik, Aden McJury, and Titus Edwards. Second row, Wyatt Lukins, Chace Behning, Lucas Favory, Owen Reynolds, Conner Lothamer, and Luke Harkless. Third row, manager Austin Haiflich, Kaidyn Inostroza, Parker Behning, Cody Cox, Luke Dreiband, Eli Behning, Ethan Michael, Hudson Roller, Carson Powell, and Zach Willson. Not Pictured: Hunter Douglas, Hayden Bennett, Eli Thomas, Nolan Weedman.

By RYAN WALKER

Norwell is coming off of an impressive season last year, when it earned a share of the Northeast 8 Conference with Bellmont — the first title in school history.

The team sent four to the semi-state round before officially ending the season. As a team, the Knights placed fourth in the sectional.

Two of them, Tyler Luther (195) and Stuart McCabe (182), have graduated, along with four other weight classes to fill in.

Head coach John Johnson says that the team will be relatively young, but is looking to use the NE8 title as a building block for the program.

“I wouldn’t say these are expectations, but just a hope that we begin to build a culture of success that motivates kids in the room to be better,” Johnson said.

Of the top returners, sophomore Hunter Douglas (106) headlines the group with a sectional championship and a 30-5 record in his first season.

Senior Eli Behning also brings the Knights back a 27-13 record at 170 last year, and junior Cody Cox, who went 23-4. Johnson also mentioned Ethan Michael as a key contributor.

In terms of the rest of the group, Johnson said that the numbers are slightly down this year, not returning a few wrestlers and a low freshmen class. He doesn’t anticipate it being an issue for the team, though.

“That obviously affects our depth, but I’m used it,” Johnson said. “Our goal is to fill a lineup and compete. I think if we can make weight, stay healthy, and get lucky every now and again, we will be fine.”

The Bellmont Braves, who are usually at the top of the NE8 every year, will be a tough out again this season. Johnson warns that coaches in the conference are staying with their respective programs and continuing to make it tougher.

Of the teams mentioned are New Haven, DeKalb and East Noble.

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# Johns, Cruz headline strong Tigers team

By RYAN WALKER

The Bluffton wrestling team had a solid season last year under head coach Ben Sprunger.

The team placed fourth in the ACAC and sixth in the sectional while sending three wrestlers to the semi-state and Levi Johns to the state meet.

The Tigers will bring back several key pieces to the team, including Johns, and Sprunger is always setting the bar high for his

squad, especially in the ACAC.

“The expectation is always to go out there and be able to compete,” Sprunger said. “Adams Central and Jay County, they have really solid programs — they’re really good. Ultimately, I’d love to be top-three in the conference, which is usually something we do pretty consistently.”

Johns, at 113, finished the year with a 39-5 record and first-round exit in the

state finals. After falling to Jay County’s Daniel Moore in the sectional championship, Johns got the best of him to win the regional 9-0.

Sprunger, also a former state competitor, has been invested in Johns a sparing partner during the season and in the postseason. He says that he is trying to get him to stay in the 113 lb. weight class and make a run.

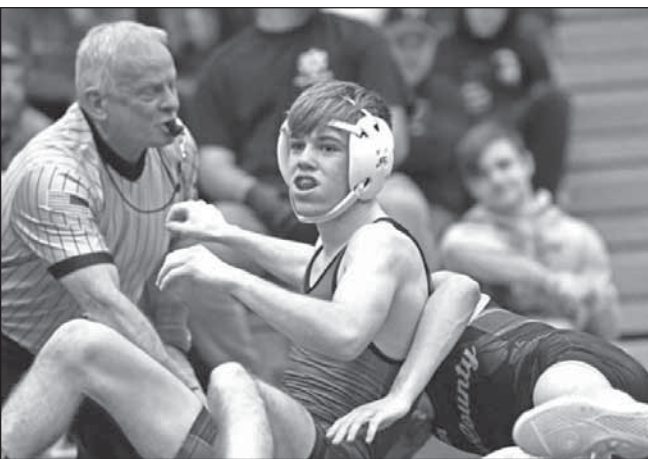
Another key piece this season is heavyweight John-

ny Cruz. The senior finished 36-4 last year, falling just short in the semi-state to qualify for states.

Johns and Cruz will be the top two guys for Bluffton and should be in the running to make it to the final weekend, but it won’t be easy.

The expectation is that both of them make it to Saturday at state, which means that’s top-eight,” Sprunger said. “That’s the ultimate

(Continued on Page 11)



Bluffton’s Levi Johns gets up after a postseason victory last season. The junior will lead the Tigers after a state appearance last season (Photo by Glen Werling)

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## WRESTLING

## Wrestling numbers continue growing for Duncan's second season

By RYAN WALKER

The Southern Wells wrestling program continues to grow in the right direction under the watch of second-year head coach Jacob Duncan.

In his first season as an assistant in 2021-22, the team had just four wrestlers. Two years later, the Raiders have a full roster with 20 members on it.

The total is up from 11 from last season, with the majority of them new faces and/or underclassmen. With the young group, Duncan is looking for his upperclassmen Peyton Long and Bradon Enochs to keep the team in check.

"I see them as stepping into a leadership role to make sure the team is working hard at all times," Duncan said.

The Raiders do bring back some talent from last season with some top competitors. Of the seven returnees, Peyton Long leads the charge with a regional qualification and a 29-14 record.

Other top returners are Bradon Enochs and Jarin Frauhiger, who had a 24-10

record.

On the roster, there certainly will be more depth, which is good for practices. The more wrestlers on the team, the more sparring athletes will be able to compete and learn from each other.

The only slot that Duncan's group will need to fill in is the 103-pound weight class, which will be tough to reach. But other than that, he wants to see his team be more competitive.

"Our expectations for the team this year is to compete, go out and battle every match," Duncan said. "Take care of what needs to be done to help the team win."

Last season, Southern Wells placed sixth in the ACAC meet at the end of the season, and eighth in the sectional meet.

In the conference this year, Jay County should be the favorite again to repeat. Adams Central and South Adams will contend, while Bluffton returns a pair of semi-state guys.

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Members of the Southern Wells wrestling team are from left to right: Front row, Case Boxell, Dannicka Sorenson, Ryan Rarber. Second row, Clayton Peterson, Blayden Schomber, Kaden Bercot, Aiden Carroll, Jarin Frauhiger, Kalib Richardson, Khloe Enochs. Third row: Head coach Jacob Duncan, Kelton Barr, Chandler Murhphy, Colten Clark, Bradon Enochs, Sean McClellan, Robbie Freimuth, Derrick Rockwell, and assistant coach William Fiechter.

## Johns, Cruz headline

(Continued from Page 10)

goal if everything goes as planned, but you never know. The competition is always tough, and in the state tournament, there's no gimmes. Everyone wants to get down there."

Other contributors to the Tigers will be Brody Lewis at 145 (24-13), Jake Boots, and Lukas Gehrett, who finished third in the sectional (17-14).

The rest of the team has

spent the last few weeks outside of the wrestling room due to the football team's success. Sprunger hasn't been able to have more than about five guys a practice thus far due to that.

Though last year, the Tigers made it to the regional in football, like this year, it still makes it difficult to get work done and get into wrestling mode.

"It makes a little quick turnaround for us-some of

them only have five practices, which is all you have to have, but it makes them shake off the rust a little earlier and push their shape a little bit," Sprunger said.

In the conference, Jay County, Adams Central and South Adams will always be tough to compete with. The Tigers should be in the mix in the top-three, as Sprunger mentioned.

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 12/2 @ Oak Hill 1:30pm  
 12/9 Fort Wayne Blackhawk Christian 7:30pm  
 12/15 DeKalb 7:45pm  
 12/22 @ Bluffton 7:30pm  
 12/27 @ Decatur Central 12:00pm  
 12/30 @ Adams Central 7:30pm  
 1/6 Leo 7:45pm  
 1/9 @ Wayne 3:30pm  
 1/9 @ Wayne 7:30pm  
 1/12 @ Belmont 7:30pm  
 1/20 New Haven 7:45pm  
 1/27 @ East Noble 1:30pm  
 2/3 Columbia City 1:30pm  
 2/6 Heritage 7:30pm  
 2/9 @ Huntington North 7:30pm  
 2/16 Jay County 7:45pm  
 2/17 @ Fort Wayne Concordia Lutheran 7:30pm  
 2/23 @ Homestead 7:30pm

## BLUFFTON TIGERS

11/25 @ Blackford 7:30pm  
 12/1 South Adams 7:30pm  
 12/8 Lakeland Christian Academy 7:30pm  
 12/15 @ Southern Wells 7:30pm  
 12/16 @ Garrett 7:30pm  
 12/22 Norwell 7:30pm  
 12/28 Eastern 1:30pm  
 12/28 Randolph Southern 7:30pm  
 1/3 Central Noble 7:30pm  
 1/6 Woodlan 7:30pm  
 1/19 @ Adams Central 7:30pm  
 1/23 @ Wabash 7:45pm  
 1/26 Jay County 7:30pm  
 1/27 @ Madison-Grant 7:30pm  
 2/1 @ Eastbrook 7:30pm  
 2/3 Heritage 2:30pm  
 2/3 Heritage 7:30pm  
 2/6 @ Manchester 7:30pm  
 2/9 Northfield 7:30pm  
 2/16 @ Belmont 7:30pm  
 2/17 Mississinewa 7:30pm  
 2/23 @ Southwood 7:45pm

## SOUTHERN WELLS RAIDERS

11/22 Belmont 7:30pm  
 12/1 @ Adams Central 7:30pm  
 12/5 Eastbrook 7:30pm  
 12/12 Northfield 7:30pm  
 12/15 Bluffton 7:30pm  
 12/16 @ Smith Academy 2:00pm  
 12/19 Southwood 7:30pm  
 12/28 @ Elwood 12:00pm  
 12/28 Union City 3:00pm  
 1/6 @ Heritage 7:30pm  
 1/23 Muncie Burriss 7:00pm  
 1/26 @ South Adams 7:30pm  
 1/27 Lakeland Christian Academy 7:30pm  
 2/1 @ Jay County 7:30pm  
 2/6 Elwood 7:30pm  
 2/9 Woodlan 7:30pm  
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 2/17 Union City 7:30pm  
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