

Baseball

Can the Panthers top 2022 season?

Division I signee, six returning letterwinners offer good start

By JIM LUTGENS
Sports Editor

Last spring was an exciting time for the NRHEG High School baseball team, which finished 12-5 overall, 8-3 for third in the Gopher Conference and fourth in Section 2AA.

So how can the 2023 Panthers top its best season in more than a decade? "The best thing is we have a lot of guys returning," said fourth-year head coach Mark Lee.

As usual, they had some quality players graduate in Alex Dobberstein, Clay Stenzel, Ben Schoenrock and Tyrone Wilson, all two-year starters who would have been three-year starters if not for the COVID epidemic.

"That's a lot of experience we lost," said Lee.

It has left the coach wondering who's going to play where, but he has a pretty good idea.

"We don't really know what's happening with our infield and catching positions yet, but we've got an idea," said Lee. "We're going to be able to mix and match pretty well with some returning guys and some younger guys that are coming up with some good experience."

The Panthers return some outstanding talent in Andrew Phillips, Ethan Thompson, Daxter Lee, Jackson Chrz, Sam Olson and Alden Dobberstein.

Phillips, a senior, is a two-time all-conference player, two-time team Gold Glove Award winner and MVP

of the squad last spring. He's committed to play Division I baseball at South Dakota State.

Thompson, the team's Best Bat Award winner last season, was third team all-conference. Three-year letterman Daxter Lee has been the Panthers' Best Pitcher Award winner two years in a row, being named first team all-conference last year.

Olson, Chrz and Dobberstein figure to lead the pitching staff.

"Andrew Phillips will throw for as well," said Coach Lee. "We also got Jared Lee, a freshman, along with Aidan Schlaak and Aden Hanna, to go with it. At times, we're going to need as many arms as we can as the season goes on. But we've got three really solid starters, and we've got two to three really solid relievers. So I think we're gonna be really solid on the mound."

The Panthers look to be led by Phillips and Daxter Lee.

"Andrew is a quiet leader, but yet he's getting more vocal this year, which is good to see. Daxter, he's always a leader. He's not afraid to, you know, help the younger guys. He's helping Andrew do things. Those two work together off each other real well. So they're feeding off each other again this year."



Mark Lee



CAN THEY TOP IT? — Hoping to better last season for the NRHEG baseball team are, front from left: Dakota Malakowski, Jared Lee, Ethan Thompson, Andrew Phillips, Daxter Lee, Jace Ihrke. Back: Sam Olson, Jackson Chrz, Alden Dobberstein, Aidan Schlaak, Brian Possin and Aaden Hanna. Not pictured: Seth Staloch.
Star Eagle photo by Eli Lutgens

Phillips and Thompson are the lone seniors.

Coach Lee looks forward to watching Phillips.

"There's just a lot of little things that he does," said Lee. "Not everybody's going to see it, but us coaches, some of us coaches, could see it. His swing is a man's swing. And his speed is unbelievable. His technique at the plate is what sets him apart. It comes down to his work ethic. He's got the 'it' factor."

Coach Lee hopes the Panthers, sparked by experience, leadership and speed, can contend for the conference crown. Unfortunately, he lists the squad's biggest weakness as

depth, meaning they'll probably need to stay healthy to enjoy success.

"We need our pitchers to throw lots of strikes and get early outs," said Lee. "Along with being active on the bases."

Lee, assisted by Aaron Phillips and Shawn Larson, lists the conference favorites as Randolph, Hayfield, NRHEG and USC. Belle Plaine, New Ulm and Sibley East look to be the class of Section 2AA.

"I believe that they need to be reminded that we're a good team," said Lee. "I keep telling them that we're a good team. We feel that we can win our conference if a couple of things go our way. We've got a good confer-

"We need our pitchers to throw lots of strikes and get early outs."

— Coach Mark Lee

ence, but I think that we're going to be right up there. We've got a mix of good athletes. We got a lot of good ball players."

NRHEG BASEBALL 2023 SCHEDULE			
April 4	USC	4:30	
April 6	WEM	4:30	
April 11	Blue Earth Area	5 p.m.	
April 13	Triton	5 p.m.	
April 15	ML-GHEC	Noon	
April 17			at Randolph 4:30
April 18			at TCU 5 p.m.
April 20			at USC 4:30
April 27			BP at Austin 5 p.m.
May 1			Hayfield 4:30
May 4			at JWP 4:30
May 5			Pine Island 7 p.m.
May 9			Triton 4:30
May 11			vs. Kenyon-W 4:30
May 15			at Maple River 4:30
May 16			at Albert Lea 5 p.m.
May 18			Medford 4:30

Clay target shooting



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT — NRHEG clay target team members Keegan Peterson, Ciara Stenzel, J.P. Lynne, Alex Wyrum and Hunter Woodham prepare for the 2023 spring season.
Submitted photo

Panthers returning almost everyone from last season

By JIM LUTGENS
Sports Editor

If there's one program at NRHEG High School that has enjoyed consistent success throughout the years, it's the clay target shooting team.

This spring's crew, led by head coach Dan Sorum and assistants Matt Beauvais, Josh Burgess and Kim Olson, returns 42 of 46 athletes who competed last year. Among them are top shooters Adam Eustice, Alden Dobberstein, Eva Wayne, Keira Lenort, Seah Beauvais, Ned Bell, Brody Mudgett and Reese Routh, all varsity letterwinners a year ago.

High expectations go with the territory. "It is always our goal to win the conference and qualify for the state tournament," said Sorum.

The 2023 squad includes 10 seniors and 21 junior high athletes.

"Our ability to sustain for the future is bright as well," said Sorum.

Something the Panthers can't control - the weather - is perhaps their key to success.

"Weather played a huge factor last year," said Sorum. "Since each team shoots at their home range on their chosen day each week, it can mean one team has great weather while another team does not. While this was not the only factor we faced, it was a huge obstacle to overcome."

Sorum invites anyone interested to attend the Panthers' events.

"While clay target shooting does not have a stadium or court with seating for fans, we do love it when supporters come and watch the athletes compete. As the weather gets warmer, we certainly encourage folks to come and enjoy this sport with us."

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