

INAUGURAL
ISSUE

August/September 2022

VICTORY

READY TO
ROAR
TROY'S JAHKAI LANG



See more stories inside on area high school athletes!

Welcome to the debut issue of **VICTORY**! This magazine that you are holding for the first time has been in the works for a while, and now after months of work, we are thrilled to have the first edition roll off the press.

Westplex Media Group is excited to launch this free bimonthly magazine that will feature the many triumphs and highlights of the area prep sports scene. Distributed to over 3,000 readers in Warren and Lincoln counties, **VICTORY** is the new go-to source for our local sports fans and athletes.

When I started my journalism career 20 years ago, I spent many Friday nights roaming the sidelines at area football fields, nights in the basketball gym and shooting photos at a baseball or softball field. While countless stories focused on the wins and losses, it was the stories beyond those outcomes that were more rewarding to write and tell. When looking at the area prep sports landscape, our staff realized too many stories of athletes were missing and not being told.

It wasn't long ago that the athletes featured in this magazine were throwing the baseball in the backyard with their dad, shooting baskets until darkness set in, or kicking a soccer ball with neighborhood kids. Beginning with this debut edition, we get to celebrate their triumphs and highlight their unique stories.

Now that we have the first edition completed, we're looking for your help. We want to hear about the great athletes and stories so we can feature them in future issues. If they live or have ties to Lincoln or Warren counties, we want to tell their stories. Also, please make sure to support our advertisers who have made the printing of **VICTORY** possible.

We'll see you in the stands!

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Ready for a banner season



Lady Owls on quest for Final Four following 20-3 campaign

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

The Silex Owl softball team is looking to make it to the final four of the state tournament this season after reaching the state quarterfinals last season.

The Owls finished last season 20-3. They won the district title and lost to St. Elizabeth 7-3 in the state quarterfinals. Although the Owls lost a few senior contributors, assistant softball coach Robert James believes the team is in good shape heading into this season.

“The hope is that we’ll learn from that,” James said. “We did not play our best game in that quarterfinal game. Not to take anything away from St. Elizabeth, they were very good, but we can play with that team and so the hope is to win a district title, get to a sectional, get to a quarterfinal. Maybe push through and get to the final four.”

Senior Sara Grateke also believes the postseason experience the team gained last season will help in their quest to reach the state semifinals this season. She cited the pressure-type games the team has already been through.

“Now that we’ve been through that once, we’ll be better this time,” Grateke said.

James, who is also the head varsity girls basketball coach, has liked the team’s participation in summer workouts. He sees the same commitment with the student-athletes as he saw 20 years ago when he first worked at Silex. He worked at Silex for 11 years before moving to Winfield High School for eight years. He returned to Silex last season.

“You go to the gym and you see the banners,” James said. “There’s a lot of banners to prove that the extra work that they’ve put in has really pushed us over the top. I don’t see us having a

lot of the success in the past or in the future without that.”

James noted they had 26 athletes at an early morning workout in July. He credited the parents of Silex student-athletes. The parents do a good job of raising children in the area, he said. The athletes understand what commitment is and what hard work looks like, James said.

Junior softball player Abigail Mooney believes the team made good progress over the course of summer workouts as they prepared for the season.

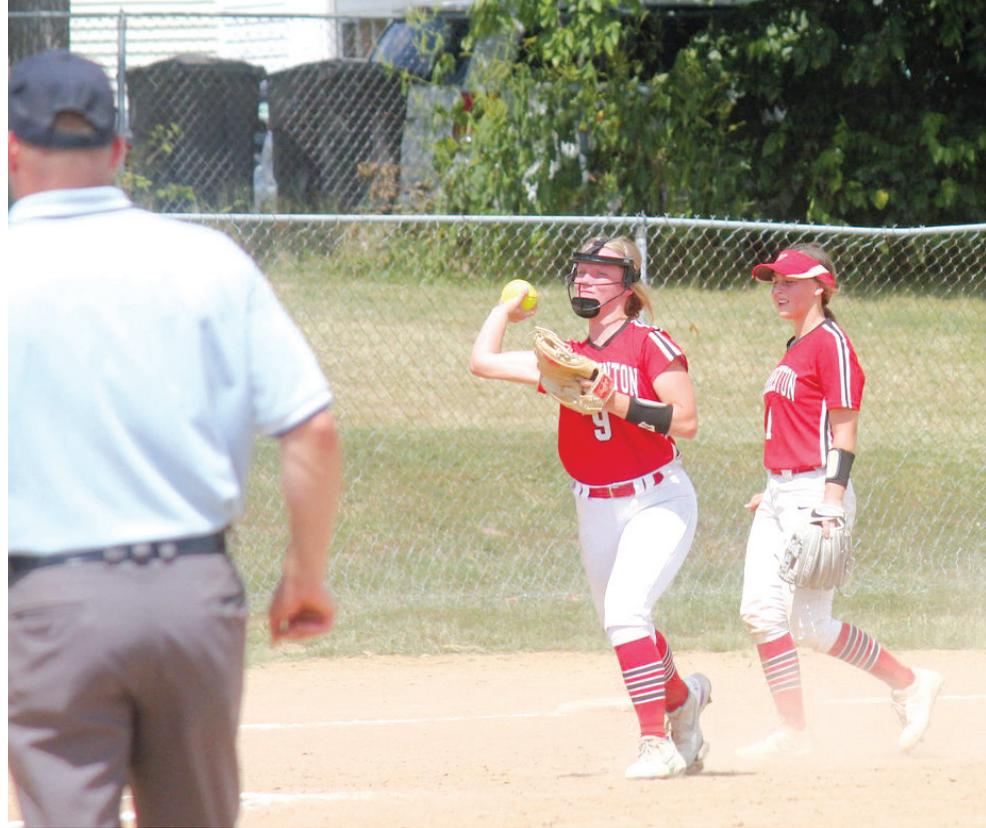
“We have already picked up where we left off last season and we’ve already gotten better,” Abigail Mooney said.

Many of the softball athletes also play other sports at Silex, which has about 150 students in the high school. Grateke, along with Abigail Mooney, Maci Mooney and Karlie Ellis, all play softball, basketball and run track. All four of the athletes agree playing multiple sports helps them be prepared to go from one sport to the next. They also see benefits with having many of the same teammates in multiple sports.

“During softball season, we don’t do as much basketball,” Maci Mooney said. “But in the summer, you’re still working on skills and you’re not just not doing anything for nine months.”

James believes the variety of sports in which Silex athletes participate makes them a well rounded athlete. It also shows them the importance of being a good teammate.

“They just get so used to being around each other,” James said. “They’re around each other all the time. The family part of it, it’s not something you just label family. It truly is. They spend as much time as they probably do with their family. I know I do. So you’re just around each other a lot. You learn how to work with each other and you go through the bumps and bruises and the good stuff, too.”



Senior leader

Lady Warriors' lone senior being counted on to lead by example

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

As the lone senior on this year's team, Mackenzie Hurst is set to lead the Warrenton softball team as they look to return to the state tournament this season.

The Lady Warriors won a district title and reached the state tournament last season. Warrenton lost two all-state players and a third player who was named to the all-district team to graduation last season. Warrenton softball coach Chad Berrey is looking to Hurst and other key returning players to preserve the culture created by last year's senior class.

"We're looking to our four to five returning starters to return and hopefully preserve the culture that we had last year and continue our success," Berrey said.

Hurst is a senior captain this season. Hurst led the team last season with 22 extra base hits and a .719 slugging percentage. She earned all-region honors last season. Hurst stressed the family atmosphere that the team had last season made the sport more enjoyable, she said. The team has a lot of new faces this season, including nine freshmen.

"I'm hoping that we can continue to be successful," Hurst said. "But not only that, but to keep the family feeling that we had last year. We hadn't had that the first few years. And then last year we actually all got along really well and it was a lot more enjoyable. So I'm hoping for that again this year. As the only senior, I'm trying to keep that going."

After playing mostly second base and shortstop prior to starting her high school career, Hurst has settled in at third base for Warrenton. While the transition was challenging

Mackenzie Hurst (9) celebrates with Warrenton coach Chad Berrey after hitting a home run in last year's district championship game. Above, Hurst throws the ball to first base during a game last season. Hurst is the lone senior on the Lady Warriors this season.

at first, Hurst believes she has settled into her position. She believes her comfort level at the third base position helped her offensive numbers improve over the past couple seasons, along with a growing confidence. Hurst's offensive numbers have improved each year for the Lady Warriors.

"The environment has changed a lot just with all the girls changing and the chemistry of the team," Hurst said. "So I think comfort was the biggest thing and confidence."

According to Berrey, Hurst's talent combined with her elite work ethic and attention to detail took her game to the next level. He is looking for Hurst to take on a leadership role as the lone senior on the team. Hurst leads by example by the way she practices, plays and lifts up her teammates, Berrey said.

"Probably every coach in the nation preaches attention to detail," Berrey said. "But Mack takes that to the next level. Everything she does, she does with precision. She's meticulous with her practice. She does everything right. So with her raw natural talent and her work ethic, she has become an elite athlete and I'm looking for some big things coming from her."

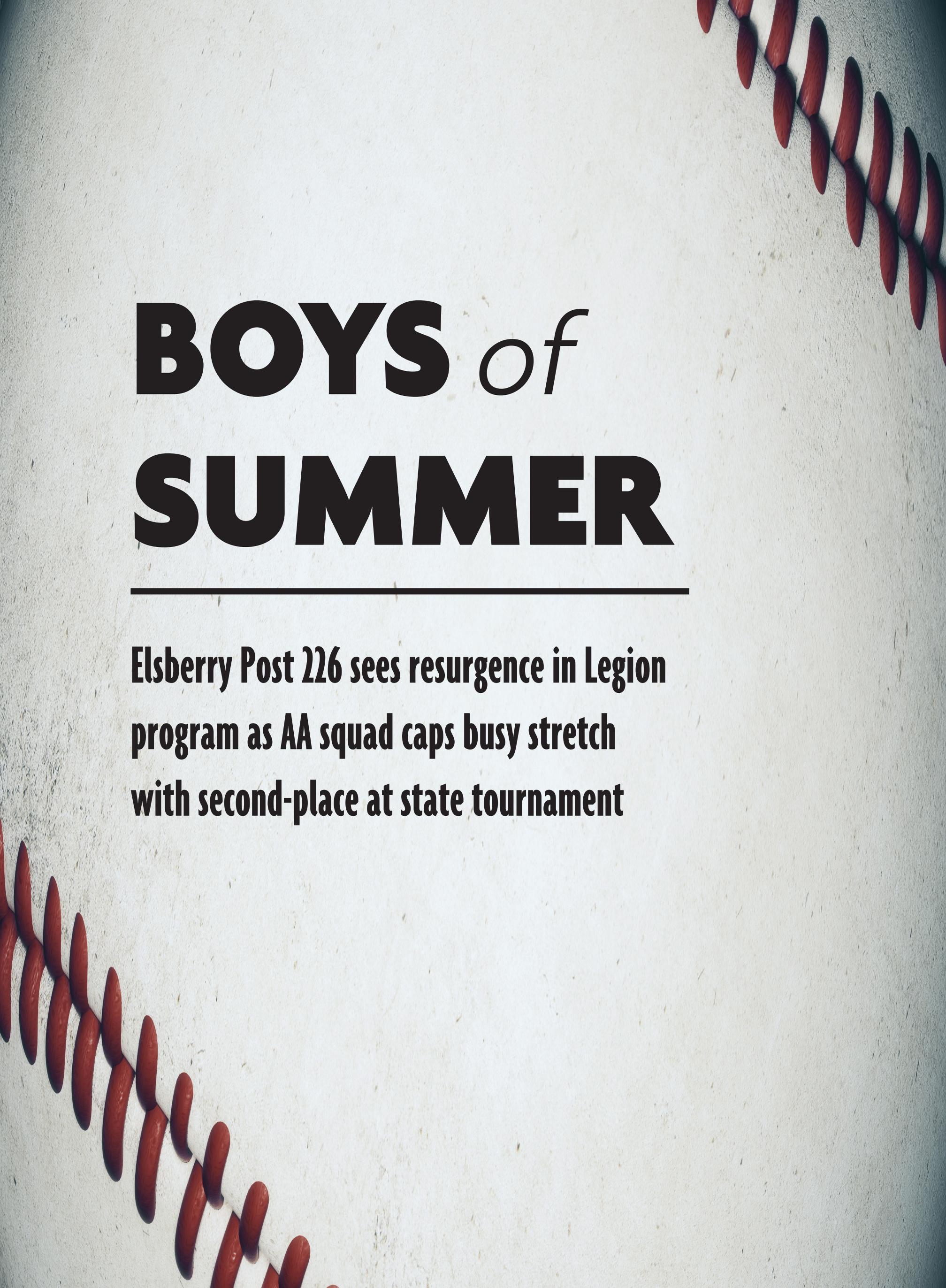
After being negative early in her high school career, Hurst now focuses to keep her body language positive. This helps her and her teammates perform at a high level, she believes.

Hurst hopes to help the newcomers to the team transition through their first season on the varsity team. Hurst specifically cited the team's success last season and the improvement she has had each of her first three seasons.

With such an inexperienced roster this fall, Berrey believes Hurst will be the example the team needs this season.

"Mackenzie is a perfect image of what we want," Berrey said. "And I think she'll do a pretty good job with us putting that pressure on her. We tell other players, if you can mirror what Mackenzie does in practice, in a game and in the dugout, we will have the culture that you guys want to be a part of."

“ Everything she does, she does with precision. She's meticulous with her practice. She does everything right. So with her raw natural talent and her work ethic, she has become an elite athlete and I'm looking for some big things coming from her. ”



BOYS *of* **SUMMER**

Elsberry Post 226 sees resurgence in Legion program as AA squad caps busy stretch with second-place at state tournament



The AA Junior-Red legion team that took second in state is shown. Members of the team are DJ Barth (14), Trent Albrecht (28), Camden Palmer (6), Walker Chandler (5), Carson White (4), Cayden Palmer (1), Gavin Marshall (50), Zach Gibson (13), Gavin Woodson (15), Noah Taylor (10), Logan Havican (20), Brady Creech (27), Kyle Thompson (3), Landon Niederer (33), Nate Wibbenmeyer (24), Alex Kinnie (7). Assistant coaches are Bill Woodson, Shaun Marshall, Jason Howard and Tracy Hunter. Head coach is Chad Creech.

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

The Elsberry Legion Post 226 baseball program had another successful season this summer, highlighted by the AA team's runner-up finish at state.

Elsberry Legion Post 226 fielded four teams this past season. They fielded one team in the A and AAA age groups and two teams in the AA age group. The experienced AA team made it all the way to the AA state championship. After winning the district title and placing second in the zone tournament, they advanced to the state tournament. They beat Sedalia Post 642 6-5 to advance to the state final. They fell to Washington Post 218 6-0 in the championship game.

Chad Creech, the team's coach, noted this was the second year with the same core of the players on the team. He believes last year's experience helped the team this season.

"We had a little success last year," Creech said. "They carried that over into this year. We had some strong pitching this year and solid defense. That's pretty much what carried us the whole year. And we play good, solid team baseball. The kids love playing together and it's always playing for each other."

All four Elsberry Post 226 Legion teams were comprised of athletes from different high schools in Elsberry and the surrounding areas. The team jelled well from the early part of the season. Creech believes the players' familiarity with each other helped, since many of the athletes play against each other in baseball and other sports throughout the year.

Creech touted the team's strong start. They went 15-2 in their first 17 games. After hitting a wall and losing to a couple bad teams in the middle of the season, a win over an 18U

team turned the tide. Elsberry Post 226 overcame a three-run deficit in the seventh inning to come back and win the game.

"Ever since that moment there, they just kind of took off," Creech said. "We got into postseason play and started hitting. That's what we always said. I said if we ever hit, this team is going to be deadly. Because we could pitch and we could play defense. We were deep at those. And it all kind of came together. Three quarters of the way through, we started hitting. They carried it over all the way through the postseason."

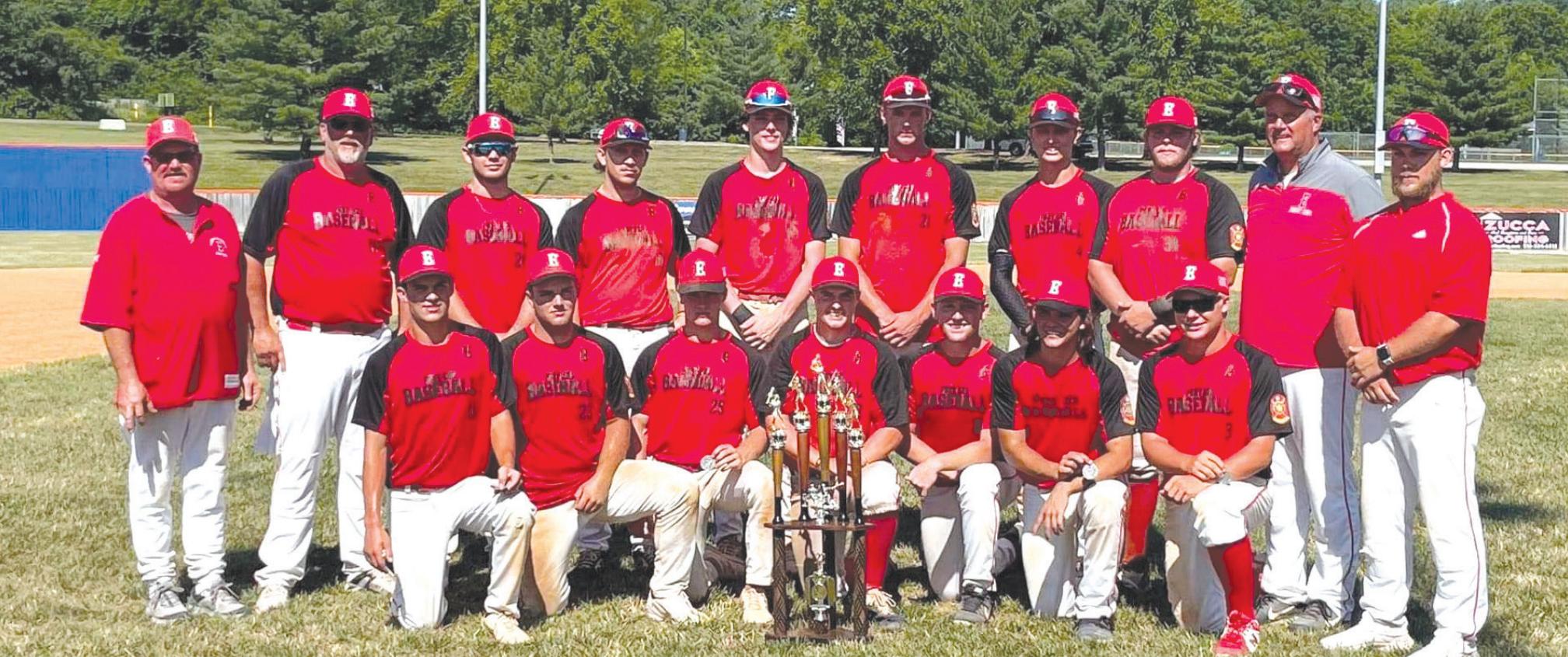
Creech added the players played 48 games in 55 days. Every game is a seven-inning game. He also stressed the competitive aspect of Legion baseball. The team had to win games in postseason play to advance in tournament play.

"We've got district tournament, state zone tournament for qualifying," Creech said. "It actually makes you feel a whole lot better that you get to qualify for something. You earn it. You don't just get to pay for it. The kids get a more competitive feeling that way."

Elsberry Post 226 program director Jason Howard believes the AA team's success is something they can utilize as they look to continue growing the program. This year was the second time this group made it to state. They also qualified for state at the freshman level.

Elsberry Post 226 has had strong teams throughout the last 15 years under Howard's tenure. They generally win 20-plus games. The A team and other AA team had stronger seasons than their records indicate, Howard said. Both teams were inexperienced but improved throughout the course of the season.

Continued on Page 7



The AAA senior legion team is shown. Members of the team are Josiah Bockhorst (11), Ethan Bright (2), Ryan Capps (34), Kaden Chandler (30), Brayden Elmer (19), DJ Feldman (27), Brady McLeod (15), Alex Miller (3), Carter Peek (44), Logan Peek (4), Cody Pogue (35), Gavin Reller (23), Brayden Reynolds (16), Gavin Rowland (24), Brock Stuckey (22), Kyle Turnbull (21), Nate Walker (25), Duncan Whiteside (8). Coaches are Mike Martin, Tim Reller, Jason Turnbull and Tyler Turnbull.

“For both our freshman team and our second AA team, their record did not reflect it but they had a good season as far as learning and getting better,” Howard said.

Elsberry hosted a Legion zone tournament for the first time this season. They hosted the zone tournament because they won the district tournament.

Creech cited the community support at the postseason games hosted by Elsberry. They had around 100 spectators at the zone championship game, he said. Creech, who played Legion baseball 20 years ago, believes popularity for Legion baseball is slowly increasing.

“That’s all there was. Legion was humongous,” Creech said. “And of course, with all these tournaments now, it kind of took a back seat. And now it’s kind of everybody’s kind of wanting to stop wasting all their money. And we’re just kind of coming

back. We started getting more quality kids here.”

Howard believes there are many benefits to participating in the Elsberry Post 226 Legion baseball program. They always offer teams at all three levels. The cost is considerably low, he said. They charged \$450 this past season. The cost may be around \$500 next year due to what they offer, according to Howard. The program’s focus is to teach the players to play the game hard and to respect and love the game. They also focus on creating and preserving a family atmosphere.

“One of the biggest things that I’ve always preached about our program and I try to stress this to our coaches is it’s not just about baseball to us,” Howard said. “Yes, we want to go on the field, win and we want to compete the best we can. But I just think that we’re also trying to help create young men in this world and this society to go out and help this world.”



The freshman legion team is shown. Members of the team are Peter Daskalakis (42), Beau Schulte (10), Brendan Scherder (5), Easton Twellman (32), Kyle Boschert (2), Talen Herrell (23), Brennan Howard (18), Ryder Wilson (13), Braydin Dillin (4), Kaden Rowland (55), Jackson Tucker (50), Will Tucker (27), Cruz Cichon (11), Alex St. John (1), Matt Powers (16), Landon Love (12), Noah Howard (14) and Brady Sheppard (9). Assistant coaches are Zach Levy, Brian Scherder and Zach Wilson. Head coach is Jason Howard.



NEXT STEP: SEC

BEFORE HE HEADS TO MIZZOU, JAHKAI LANG WANTS ANOTHER PLAYOFF RUN FOR TROJANS

Story and photos by John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

Troy Buchanan star defensive end Jahkai Lang is set to fulfill his goal of competing in the SEC after committing to play football at the University of Missouri.

After receiving multiple NCAA Division I offers, Lang committed to Mizzou at the end of his junior year. Lang was recruited at the beginning of his sophomore year and the recruiting process concluded at the end of his junior year with his commitment to Mizzou. Lang will fulfill his goal from his freshman year of playing in the SEC.

“I asked him in the weight room one day his freshman year. I said a pretty vague question about what’s

your goal with football,” Troy Buchanan head football coach Ryan Nesbitt said. “And he looked at me and at that time he didn’t hardly talk at all and he just said SEC. His focus level, his drive, what makes him tick on the inside has certainly been part of what’s gotten him where he’s at. He’s an incredibly self disciplined kid.”

Mizzou was one of Lang’s first three offers. Lang credited the Mizzou staff for building a relationship with him. He also liked the proximity and that they compete in the SEC.

“Those guys, they really stay consistent,” Lang said. “Really built the relationship. I mean even people like Coach (Elijah) Drink(witz). An SEC head coach calling

you every week. They're really telling you they want you. And it's home. It's right there. Everyone around here is Mizzou fans. It works out perfect — and it's in the SEC."

Lang, who led the Trojans with six sacks last season, intends to graduate this December and then participate in spring ball at Mizzou. He is looking forward to finishing his high school football career strong and then getting acclimated at Mizzou. Lang has trained with some players currently at Mizzou and is looking forward to getting to know the rest of the team this spring.

Lang is the first power five conference player Nesbitt has coached. Nesbitt noted Lang's maturity level, which Nesbitt said is well beyond his years. Lang has been incredibly humble through the whole recruiting process.

"You wouldn't know he's garnered the attention that he's got," Nesbitt said. "I think he's just focused on being a good teammate first and foremost; being a good high school football player. So it makes it easy to celebrate. He's an easy one to be excited for and to celebrate those successes."

Lang said the game has slowed down each of his first three years of his high school career.

"Freshman year, it was just like everyone was just stronger than me," Lang said. "And then sophomore year, a lot of weight room stuff with us and I guess it got way easier last year, junior year. And then this year should be, I mean should be easier I'm guessing. The game slows down over the years; every year that you do it."

Lang said while the recruiting process is what all high school players want, it can be stressful. He believes now that his decision has been made, he can focus even more on helping the Trojans as they look to compete for a state title.

Troy Buchanan advanced to the semifinals of the Class 6 state football tournament last season. They defeated Francis Howell 23-21 in the state quarterfinals to advance to the state semifinals. They lost to state runner-up Liberty North 35-21. The Trojans finished the season 10-3 after finishing with a losing record the previous season. Lang believes the Trojans have what it



takes to compete for a state title this season.

"This year it's everything. We're going for state," Lang said. "And I definitely think we're one of the top four teams in Missouri for sure. I'd say top two really. It's actually crazy because how much we lift compared to I think most other teams. A lot of these guys are really dedicated. Way dedicated, it's crazy. Especially at six in the morning."

Nesbitt believes the team's experience of making it to the state semifinals last season will help the team in their state title quest this season. The returning players will be able to use that experience this season and also help other players know what to expect.

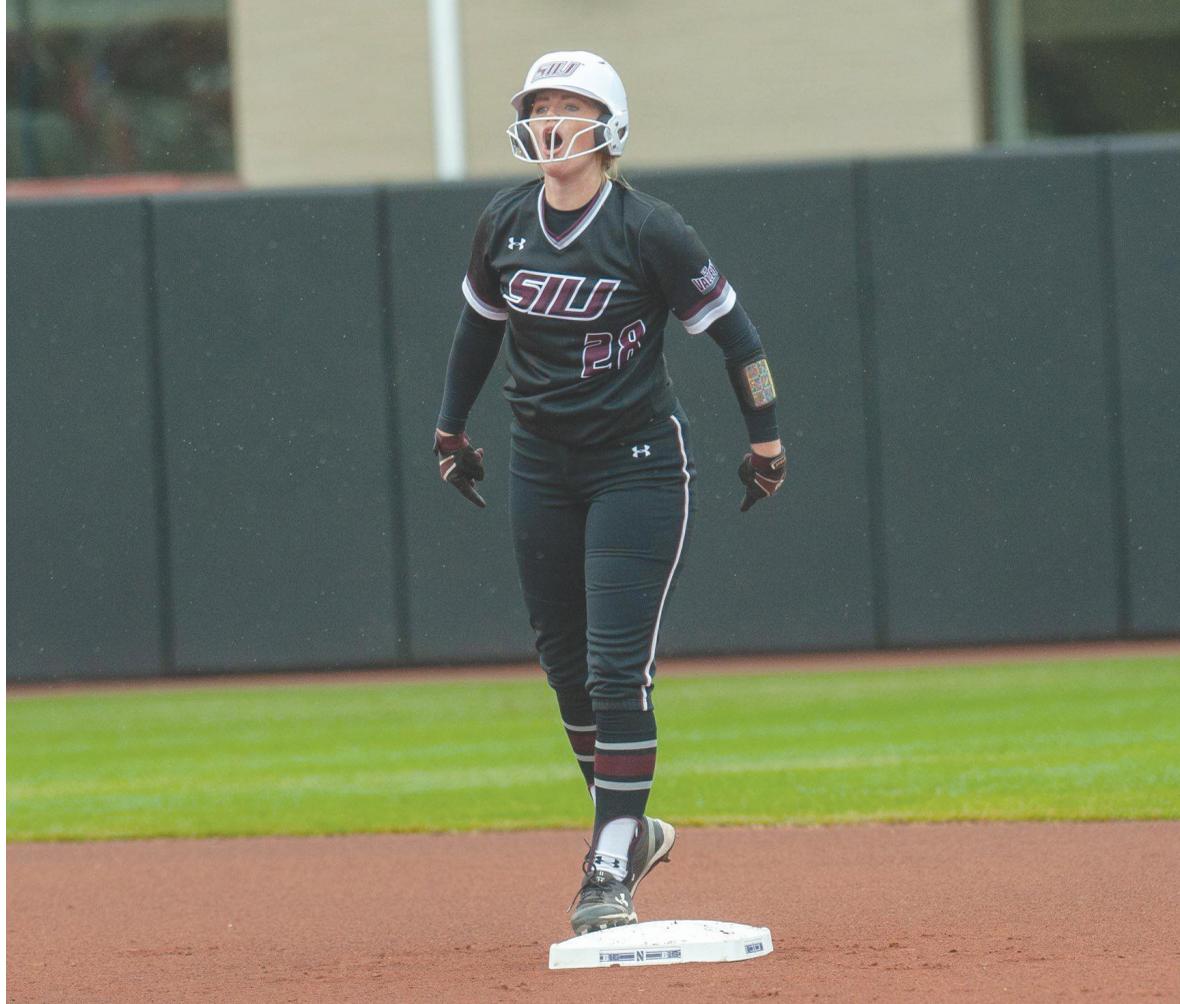
"Big stages and big moments, it was a huge environment," Nesbitt said. "So for anybody that was part of it and experienced it firsthand, it's going to play a factor again in the postseason next year. Just the maturity level of being focused on what it takes to get to that point."

“ This year it's everything. We're going for state. And I definitely think we're one of the top four teams in Missouri for sure. ”



with Jenny Jansen

Former Warrenton standout ends stellar college career at Southern Illinois University with more postseason accolades and two school records



Former Warrenton standout softball player Jenny Jansen recently concluded her five-year softball career at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. She hit .376 with eight home runs and 40 RBIs in her final campaign for the Salukis. She wrapped up her college career by setting school records in both career runs RBIs and total hits.

Jansen's effort led her to being named to the National Faspitch Coaches Association (NFCA) All-Mideast Region second team for the first time in her career. She also earned spots on the Missouri Valley Conference first team and MVC Scholar-Athlete first team.

Prior to attending SIU, Jansen played on the Warrenton softball team. She was part of two state championship teams her junior and senior years. Jansen's future plans include teaching fifth grade in Quincy, Ill., and coaching softball at Quincy Notre Dame.

What is your softball background and how did you get started into the sport?

I started playing tee-ball at like six. And I actually quit tee-ball. I didn't like it. And then my mom put me back in it at like eight maybe. And I just played coach pitch in Warrenton and me and my good friend Kaylee Anderson who also played college at SEMO, we ended up going to play competitive ball at like nine or 10 and we kind of just never stopped after that.

Is that when you started taking softball more seriously?

We went and played on a team out of the O'Fallon area and then after that we just kind of moved on to a team from St. Louis. And then she and I kind of went on two different teams and went our own ways in the travel aspect of it but about nine or 10 is probably about when we started getting pretty competitive.

When did you know you wanted to play softball at the collegiate level?

I think my freshman year of high school I got my first letter from a college just saying that they were interested and from then on out, I was kind of like I guess I am probably good enough

to go on and play in college so I should probably take this pretty seriously.

What was the recruiting process like and did it span multiple years?

Back then, the recruiting rules were a little different so now they can only talk to you your junior year of high school. But back then, they could talk to you as early as they wanted to. So I started getting letters my freshman year. My sophomore year I went on visits. I probably visited six or seven schools and had interest from some other ones that I just didn't go to. And then I committed between my sophomore and junior year to SIU.

Where do you think you grew the most as a player at Warrenton and what are you most proud of from your time as a Warrior?

Once I committed to play in college, I think it all just got more fun because it was really stressful for a while trying to figure out where I was going to go. So I think once I started just having fun with it and not worrying about where I was going to end up is where I turned the corner and I think my junior year I had a really good year and we won state that year and senior year we did as well. So I think when I was just able to play and not worry about where I was going to play in college, that's when I started playing better honestly.

Was there a big adjustment going from high school to college?

My summer team was really competitive actually so I felt like it wasn't terribly hard to switch over. But I do remember my first eight at-bats at college I got out and I was like there's no way I'm going to be able to play here. And then my first hit in college was a home run and from then on out I was like I can do this. But it definitely was just scary because all the girls were like a lot older and a lot bigger when you're a freshman in college. But I feel like

Continued on Page 11



I adjusted pretty quick and it wasn't anything that was too terribly hard to switch over to.

Was there a certain point in college when the game slowed down?

My freshman year was a really hard year. I struggled at the beginning and then kind of got on a roll towards the end. And then my sophomore year I had the best year hitting-wise that I had through all the five years I was there. And then, I don't know, I kind of felt like after that they were all the same. My senior year was pretty hard because I had to move to short-stop when I had been playing other positions the whole time because of an injury. And so I think I was more focused on my defense than my hitting and I kind of saw that drop off a little bit. But other than that, I think this past year, my fifth year, I had the most fun because I knew it was my last year and I just kind of went out there and played and I ended up having a really good year.

Are you happy with your decision to attend SIU?

Yeah I am really glad I went there. I got everything I wanted to and more. I ended up getting two degrees. I played in every game. I just wanted to go somewhere where I could leave an impact and I feel like I did that and more. And I hope that going into the future, we created a good culture there and this team continues to stay successful.

Do you have any post-college career plans?

I'm actually going to be teaching fifth grade next year up in



Quincy, Ill.. My family is from there. We moved right after I graduated high school. So I've been here the last five years so that's where I would come home to for the summers. But I got a job at Quincy Public Schools and I'm teaching this fall.

Do you have any plans to stay involved with softball?

I actually just give private hitting lessons whenever I have time. I work during the summer too. I kind of just try to fit it into my schedule. Next year, I'm planning on coaching at Quincy Notre Dame and then also coaching their junior high basketball team.

Have a story idea for a future issue? Email John Rohlf at john@warrencountyrecord.com or call 636-456-6397



Aiming to be **ELITE**

**After successful 2021 season,
junior hurler Macie Hunolt
sets sights on more success**



Troy Buchanan junior Macie Hunolt, shown making a throw during a recent practice, is back after earning all-state honors a year ago.

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

After a breakout sophomore campaign, Troy Buchanan junior Macie Hunolt has high goals for the upcoming season.

Serving as the team's main pitcher last season, Hunolt finished last season with a 17-6 record and a 1.56 earned run average in 24 starts for the Trojans last season. She threw 153 innings, after hurling 59 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings with a 4.11 ERA in her freshman season.

Hunolt believes her comfort level last season and working with coach Lance Richardson helped her make improvements from her freshman season to her sophomore season.

"I was really nervous my freshman year because I was playing with players that were a lot older than me," Hunolt said. "And he (Richardson) said I would be pitching some games so obviously I was really nervous. But now I got the hang of it and I'm a lot more confident."

She stressed she handled the ups and downs of the season better last season than she did her freshman year.

She also believes she improved at the plate last season. She finished the season with a .320 batting average and 22 RBIs. She hit .271 during her freshman season.

"My freshman year, I batted last I think and then there would be some games where I didn't play," Hunolt said. "But this year, I got used to seeing faster pitching. And I would go to the pitching machines with my dad and he would set it on like 65 (miles per hour). And I would just hit with him so I could get used to it."

Richardson believes Hunolt matured from her freshman season to her sophomore season. He believes she grew mentally from her freshman and sophomore season. She also improved from the weight room work she put in prior to her sophomore season.

"I definitely saw Macie take a big step from her freshman year to sophomore year," Richardson said. "She added velocity because of her added strength."

This year, Hunolt's goal is to be a first team all-state pitcher. She believes general improvements on the mound will help her as she attempts to reach that goal. She said she is focusing on her changeup.

"Coach Richardson always says that elite pitchers have to have elite changeups," Hunolt said. "So I've been working on my changeup a lot so that I can perfect it and it'll be even better in games."

Hunolt also believes the experience she and the Trojans gained last season can help them prepare for this season. Hunolt specifically cited the Trojans' sectional game last season against Francis Howell Central. The game spanned 12 innings and two days. Troy Buchanan lost the game 3-2. Hunolt threw all 12 innings.

Hunolt said she had to alter her strategy and trust pitches she did not throw much because of how many times she had to face the Francis Howell Central lineup.

Richardson believes last year's experience in the playoffs can help the team be prepared for similar situations this season. He noted games in the summer and during the high school sports season always have another game. This is different in the post-season, he noted.

Despite the Trojans losing several key contributors from last year's team, Richardson has liked what he has seen from the team so far. He added the team's commitment throughout summer workouts was great.

"We lost some key pieces from last season," Richardson said. "We lost our starters up the middle. But we're blessed with young talent."

A Warrior rebirth

Winfield ready to take next steps following 5-5 campaign and conference championship

By John Rohlf ■ john@warrencountyrecord.com

The Winfield Warriors made strides in a big way in the 2021 season to win the GAC North crown. Winfield won three of four conference games last season in their first season in a co-op with Elsberry High School. They finished the season with a 5-5 record. They won one game in the previous two seasons.

Head coach Cody Spegal is entering his third year leading the program. Spegal believes the influx of players and the team's familiarity with the schemes helped aid the turnaround.

"We were familiar with the offense," Spegal said. "Familiar with the defense and then honestly we just got a whole lot more kids out, a whole lot more excitement around the program. Kids continued to buy in and then just we were able to execute and we just kind of got hot and we rode our momentum."

Although there are challenges to having students from two separate high schools competing on the same high school team, Spegal noted there were many benefits to athletes from Elsberry High School joining the Warrior football program. Spegal said the athletes from the two schools meshed well together from the start. The Elsberry athletes helped fill gaps in the Winfield's roster, Spegal stressed.

"Luckily, we had already scheduled an overnight team bonding trip out to Redemption Ranch," Spegal said. "Just being able to do that team bonding during fall camp really helped out and then kind of from there, just gained some trust and was able



to take off really quickly. It's honestly a real blessing that they were able to join us."

The main challenges of the co-op is trying to get athletes from both schools together for summer workouts and practices, Spegal said.

Spegal believes the team is in a good spot for the upcoming season, with a good number of key varsity contributors returning. They will be led on offense by running back Draven Ham and guard Jorgen Kreuger. Both were first team all-conference selections. Ham led the Warriors in rushing last season and was second in all-purpose yards. Ham rushed for 553 yards and averaged over five yards per carry. He finished with 579 all-purpose yards. A senior guard, Kreuger will lead the Warrior offensive line. He also is a linebacker on defense for the Warriors.

Spegal added senior tight end and defensive end Kyle Turnbull is a player to watch this season. Turnbull was a second team all-district tight end. Turnbull had 34 total tackles and two sacks last season.

"It's only his second year playing football but he's a dominant two-way guy for us," Spegal said.

The Warriors also return other key contributors, including Austin Bray, Bryce Irving and Cody Mense.

Sophomore quarterback Conner Martin is a newcomer to watch, Spegal said. He noted Martin is one of the top 2025 quarterbacks in the St. Louis area. Martin completed three passes in four attempts last season. He threw for 105 yards and two touchdowns. Sophomore tight end and defensive end Logan Kiel is also a newcomer for whom Spegal has high hopes.

Spegal believes the Warriors' depth will be one of the team's strengths. With the strong numbers on the team this season, Spegal expects very few players to play both offense and defense. They plan to use their depth to their advantage. Spegal also noted there are more athletes interested in joining the football team.

"Now that we finally got a taste of winning, more of our better athletes in school are wanting to come join and be a part of it," Spegal said. "And so for us, it's kind of helped turn around our program in a relatively quick process."

The Warriors have their sights set on defending their conference crown. They went 3-1 in the conference last year to win the GAC North. They defeated St. Charles, St. Charles West and Warrenton.

"We have every expectation to go out and defend our conference title," Spegal said. "And I know the boys are excited. We've had a really good summer. And overall, it's just kind of our expectation."





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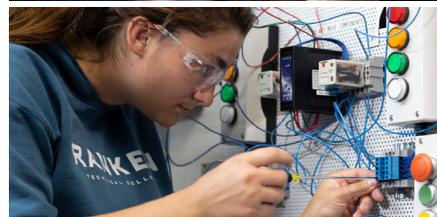
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