

# 2025-26 WINTER SPORTS PREVIEW

A special section of the Kingman Leader-Courier



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# KINGMAN

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? Contact Sports Editor Bob Morris at (620) 532-3151 or email bmmorris@kcnonline.com

## Wrestling Returns Two With Four New to Squad

BY BOB MORRIS  
Sports Editor

Kingman head wrestling coach Kaiden McElwain has six wrestlers out for this year and will look to see what two experienced wrestlers will bring, along with multiple freshmen.

McElwain said he was blessed to have three quality wrestlers last season who advanced to State and to have one of them, Collin Schreiner, reach the podium. But with those three boys gone, along with one girl who previously reached the State tournament, having graduated, McElwain will be looking to others to step forward.

But the head coach likes what he has seen from the wrestlers thus far.

"We haven't had any messing around, any dilly dallying," McElwain said. "It's been serious, been getting to work and I'm excited, I'm pumped, I'm ready for the damage they'll do in the state tournament."

"I'm hoping we'll bring a couple to State and I'm always looking to have a couple of placers. Right now, we're trying to mold the clay."

**KINGMAN WRESTLING**  
Head coach: Kaiden McElwain, third year  
Number of wrestlers: 6  
Returning wrestlers: Indigo Nichols, sr.; Joey Brannan, jr.

Out this year are senior Indigo Nichols, who is from Norwich, and junior Joey Brannan. McElwain said he is happy with the leadership the two are bringing to practice thus far.

"They're in here, they're working hard, they're being leaders in the room," he said. "If everyone else keeps taking it in and working their butts off — we're only two days in and I'm impressed so far. We're working hard."

The Kingman wrestling team has more girls than boys out this year. The rest of the wrestlers are freshmen, with Dakota Crow competing for the boys and Annie Galindo, Brionna Kessler and Brecklyn Lowmaster competing for the girls.

"I was pleasantly surprised with how many girls went out," McElwain said. "I was expecting less girls than boys because that's usually how it is."

"I'm happy with the courage that it took them to come out. It takes a lot, wrestling takes a lot and they understand that. So far they've



BOB MORRIS / Leader-Courier

Kingman head wrestling coach Kaiden McElwain observes his wrestlers as they work on stances during a recent practice.

showed up every day ready to work."

The head coach said he wants the wrestlers to maintain the work ethic and determination they have demonstrated in practice thus far.

"I've seen a couple of times in my years coaching that sometimes we start hard and then maybe a week or two goes by, people start coasting," he said. "They don't give everything and I really hope that we maintain the work ethic and drive, the determination that we've had so far throughout the year."

But McElwain said, if the

wrestlers keep working hard, they can accomplish a lot.

"I think that anything is possible as long as they work through it, they've got that work ethic," McElwain said. "I can't coach work ethic into them. That's on them. "I can coach a lot easier technique and what else it takes, but that work ethic, that's something they have to come in on their own and have. I'm blessed, it looks like everyone this year, they have that."

Assisting McElwain is Bennett McCargo, a Wichita firefighter who is a former

wrestler. McElwain said that McCargo will bring some new ideas to conditioning and serve to motivate the wrestlers.

Kingman is set to open the season at the Pratt tournament, with the girls competing on Friday and the boys on Saturday.

### 2025-26 KINGMAN HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLING SCHEDULE

Dec. 5	at Pratt tournament (G)	1 p.m.
Dec. 6	at Pratt tournament (B)	10 a.m.
Dec. 13	at Hesston tournament (B, G)	9 a.m.
Dec. 20	at Russell tournament (B)	10 a.m.
Jan. 10	at Ellsworth tournament (B)	9 a.m.
Jan. 17	at Clearwater tournament (G)	9 a.m.
Jan. 23	at Nickerson tournament (B)	1 p.m.
Jan. 30	at Garden Plain tourney (B)	3 p.m.
Jan. 31	at Larned tournament (G)	9 a.m.
Feb. 12	CPL tourney at G. Plain (B)	4 p.m.
Feb. 14	Girls Regionals	TBD
Feb. 21	Boys Regionals	TBD

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# KINGMAN

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? Contact Sports Editor Bob Morris at (620) 532-3151 or email bmmorris@kconline.com

## Hageman Happy With Energy Eagles Have Shown

BY BOB MORRIS  
Sports Editor

Tanner Hageman takes over as the head boy's basketball coach for Kingman and is excited about the number of players he has out.

The Eagles have 29 players and Hageman said they will have a full varsity, junior varsity and "C" team roster. He likes how things have gone the first few days of practice.

"I thought our tempo, energy and effort in practice has been really, really good," Hageman said. "We're making do with as many as we have."

"We're going to split those eventually and have a C team practice a little bit separately, just so that we can get a little bit more work done. Really excited about the numbers that we have."

The coaching staff is still evaluating each day to determine who will contribute where, but Hageman said he can tell how much progress the players have made from what they did during the summer.

"Especially on the offensive end, things are translat-

### KINGMAN BOYS BASKETBALL

**Head coach:** Tanner Hageman, first year  
**Record last year:** 6-15  
**Number of players:** 29  
**Key returning players:** Dawson Wood, sr.; Gabe Andersen, sr.; Trent Clark, jr.; Grayson Smith, jr.; Logan Birkenbaugh, so.; Jaxson Campbell, so.

ing to the older guys and the guys who were at camp," he said. "We do have some new faces so we are trying to get those guys caught up as quickly as we can. Like I said, the energy and the effort has been there certainly. We're just trying to kind of iron out some details."

Hageman added there is a large learning curve with what is being done and an approach that is unlike what was done in the past.

"There's a lot going each and every day at practice but it's kind of like drinking out of the fire hose, all at once and hitting you pretty heavy, but I think the guys have responded well," he said.

What has helped is that the majority of the players are familiar with what Hageman does as a coach, having played for him in either football or track.



BOB MORRIS / Leader-Courier

Kingman head boy's basketball coach Tanner Hageman, left, gives instructions to players during a recent practice.

"I think if anything, they've actually done even a better job of giving great energy and great effort on the court," Hageman said. "They're really loud, they're cheering for each other, they're out on the floor doing a lot of good things."

"I think that being able to carry over, having the same expectations, they know what it takes in terms of practice. It's great that we don't have to coach that part of it, the energy and effort part of it."

Four seniors are out: Dawson Wood, Jon Silba, Gabe Andersen and Gage Clouse. Wood enters his fourth year with the basketball program and was one of the leaders in

scoring, rebounding and assists last year in his first year of starting on varsity.

Andersen, Clouse and Silba have played basketball in different years and Hageman said they are all working hard for different roles on the team, whether it be leadership roles or playing time.

The seniors said it's been good to work with a coach they know well from football and track.

"I mean, he's a great coach," Clouse said. "He makes everybody have great, like, he brings enthusiasm and everybody is focused underneath him."

See KINGMAN / Page 5B

### 2025-26 KINGMAN HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

Dec. 5	at Mulvane	4:30 p.m.
Dec. 9-13	NextEra Classic (V, JV)	TBD
Dec. 16	Inman	4:30 p.m.
Dec. 19	Larned	4:30 p.m.
Jan. 2-3	at Dodge City tournament (V)	TBD
Jan. 6	at Pratt	4:30 p.m.
Jan. 9	Nickerson	4:30 p.m.
Jan. 10	at Cunningham tourney (C)	TBD
Jan. 13	at Medicine Lodge	4:30 p.m.
Jan. 16	Cheney	4:30 p.m.
Jan. 17	at Cunningham tourney (C)	TBD
Jan. 20-23	at Sterling tournament (V)	TBD
Jan. 30	Douglass	4:30 p.m.
Jan. 31	at Belle Plaine tourney (JV)	TBD
Feb. 3	at Conway Springs	4:30 p.m.
Feb. 6	Kiowa County	4:30 p.m.
Feb. 10	at Clearwater	4:30 p.m.
Feb. 13	at Garden Plain	4:30 p.m.
Feb. 17	Chaparral	4:30 p.m.
Feb. 20	at Belle Plaine	4:30 p.m.
Feb. 23	Wichita Trinity	4:30 p.m.

All games V, JV, C except as noted

## Young Girls Basketball Team Looks to Gain Experience

BY BOB MORRIS  
Sports Editor

The Kingman girl's basketball team will be short on experience and depth but head coach Neil Freund is hopeful that the girls can do some good things.

"I think we'll get better as the season goes on, as they gain confidence and get some experience under their belt," Freund said. "I mean, I feel we're very athletic, the entire team, so I think we should be able to defend and rebound and just find

### KINGMAN GIRLS BASKETBALL

**Head coach:** Neil Freund, second year  
**Record last year:** 6-15  
**Number of players:** 14  
**Key returning players:** Caylor Helm, sr.; Shay Watkins, sr.; Parker Beam, jr.

ways that will keep us in the game, just our athletic ability and we've just got to find ways to score the basketball."

"That's going to be the biggest thing. Just as I look around from top to bottom we're very athletic as a whole for the team. That

should allow us to defend and rebound and compete."

The Lady Eagles have 14 players out. They spent the summer coming to open gyms and Freund had them play a lot of three-on-three drills so they could learn how to score without having too many players on the floor and to get their confidence up.

"I think kids don't go out and play just basketball games growing up," he said. "They'll play in a regular league but you don't see a lot of games going on in the park or whatever, so we just worked on, hey, we're gonna play basketball, just a pick-up game and compete against each other, so that's what we did over the summer."

"I think a lot of girls gained confidence that they could do more than what they thought they could do."

The head coach said that he's seeing improvement from the girls in the first few days of practice.

"Of all the girls that are returning, I think they are physically stronger," Freund said. "You can see that they're playing much stronger than they did last year. Several of them, their skills, confidence has improved."

Because of the lack of numbers, Freund said the Lady Eagles will likely depend on some players who didn't see much varsity time to contribute in key roles.

"It's going to be a big step," he said. "So far early, we're only three practices in, but you can see they've taken on some leadership and just growing up, even if



BOB MORRIS / Leader-Courier

Kingman head girl's basketball coach Neil Freund talks to players after practice.

it's just from their freshman to sophomore year.

"I think the girls returning, I've been very happy about the improvement and just their aggressiveness and confidence."

Senior Caylor Helm, a varsity starter last season, is recovering from a knee injury but is expected to be cleared to play before the first game of the season. Senior Shay Watkins, who saw varsity time last season, is also back.

"They're both taking on leadership roles and leading by example and everything," Freund said. "Even if they're not real vocal, just by their effort and what's expected are leading."

Junior Parker Beam saw some varsity time last year and is expected to take a bigger role. Junior Jayda DeWeese is also expected to play a key role on varsity and Freund said she has improved a lot.

The Lady Eagles have four sophomores: Addy Giefer, Kate Stauffer, Marianna Gutierrez and Rylee Smith. Gutierrez and Smith are out

for the first time, while Giefer and Stauffer played a lot of junior varsity last season. Freund said they have done well in practice and will play key roles on varsity.

As for the schedule, Freund said it will be tough, with the likes of Melvine, Larned and Inman fielding quality teams, plus the NextEra Energy Classic that will

feature some good competition.

"We're going to probably take some lumps early just because we're so inexperienced," Freund said.

But he added that he was the girls to improve with each game and, as they gain experience and confidence, they should be stronger as the season progresses.

### 2025-26 KINGMAN HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

Dec. 5	at Mulvane	4:30 p.m.
Dec. 9-13	NextEra Classic (V, JV)	TBD
Dec. 16	Inman	4:30 p.m.
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Jan. 2-3	at Dodge City tournament (V)	TBD
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Feb. 20	at Belle Plaine	4:30 p.m.
Feb. 23	Wichita Trinity	4:30 p.m.

All games V, JV except as noted

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# WINTER SPORTS PREVIEW

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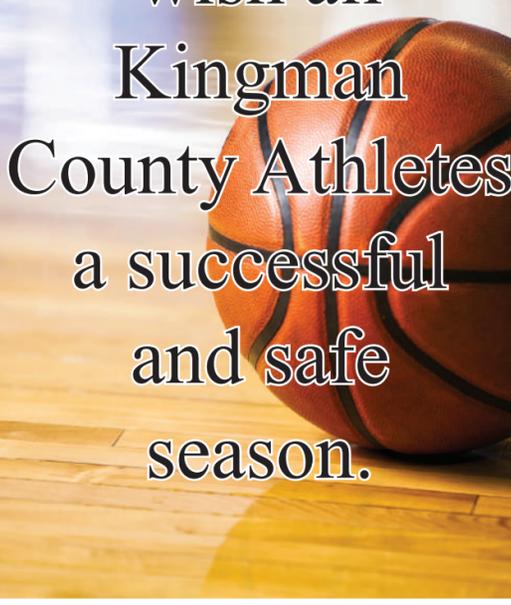
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# NORWICH

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? Contact Sports Editor Bob Morris at (620) 532-3151 or email bmmorris@kconline.com

## Expectations Raised for Boys Basketball Squad

BY BOB MORRIS  
Sports Editor

**NORWICH BOYS BASKETBALL**  
**Head coach:** Nick Kyle, sixth year  
**Record last year:** 18-4  
**Number of players:** 18  
**Key returning players:** Jayden Benghe, sr.; Tanner Gosch, jr.; Drew Kelly, jr.; Sam Hubble, jr.; Lucas Adams, jr.

“They’ve put in the work over the last several years to earn some time and I anticipate that being the case for them this year,” Kyle said. “They had a great fall season and were great senior leaders for our football team. I expect that transition to basketball as well.”

The junior class includes Sam Hubble, Drew Kelly, Tanner Gosch and Lucas Adams, all who saw considerable varsity minutes last season. Kyle said the four will all have key roles this season, either as starters or as a sixth man.

“They definitely will be a large piece of what we do,” the head coach said. “They bring size to the table that’s unmatched across most of our league this year. Those are definitely going to be matchups that we look to take advantage of.”

Other juniors such as Nolan Reese and Lucas Fisher could contribute on varsity as well.

“We have a really stout junior group, they are a massive core of our team,” Kyle said. “We look to take full

advantage of that this year.”

The head coach said that the expectations will be higher than they have been the last two years, given the experience the Eagles return.

“I’ve told them all openly and transparently that this is a group unlike I’ve ever had before, in terms of personnel,” Kyle said. “The things that we’ve done in the last five years under my lead is going to be completely different this year just based on our personnel and our experience.”

“There’s a lot of new that comes with what we are going to be able to put on the floor this year. That’s going to take some learning and some open mindedness from our upperclassmen and they’ve shown just that.”

He said that excites him as a head coach, given how the Eagles have approached things and how they are responding in practice.

“It’s going to be one of our more talented groups but also one of the more challenging seasons for me as a head coach,” Kyle said. “We all look forward to it.”



BOB MORRIS / Leader-Courier  
Norwich boy's basketball players warm up to begin practice.

The Norwich boy’s basketball team fielded a young team last year, but the junior-heavy group returns a lot of experience and thus the expectations are higher.

“We look forward to using our experience that they’ve gained over the last two years to our advantage of being a more mature team on the court, night in and night out,” said head coach Nick Kyle.

Kyle said he had good turnout for the summer program, but he wished more of the boys had gone out for football. He said those who played football showed a lot of growth, but for those that didn’t, it might take a while to get up to speed.

“It’s definitely going to take some time to get to where we know we should be this year,” Kyle said.

Still, the head coach is happy with how practices have started. While not all the players are in shape, he likes how everyone gets along in practice.

“The camaraderie is there, the connection is there,” Kyle said. “It’s obvious that this group has enough knowledge about the game to really take a step this year when it comes to what we’re able to accomplish on the court.”

“They’ve been able to work under me for the last several years and we’re really starting to see the benefits of what we want to do as a program coming to fruition. I expect our upperclassmen leadership to be in full force.”

Senior Jayden Benghe is a returning starter from the past two seasons. Bishop Tremble and Reid Brewster are the other two seniors and Kyle said he expects them to play some varsity minutes.

Date	Location	Time
Dec. 5	Belle Plaine	4 p.m.
Dec. 9-13	at Border Queen Classic (V)	TBD
Dec. 16	at Udall	4 p.m.
Dec. 19	at South Haven	4 p.m.
Dec. 22	Reno County	4:15 p.m.
Jan. 2	at Little River	4 p.m.
Jan. 6	Caldwell	4 p.m.
Jan. 8	Conway Springs	6 p.m.
Jan. 10	at Cunningham tourney (JV)	TBD
Jan. 13	at South Barber	4 p.m.
Jan. 16	Pretty Prairie	4 p.m.
Jan. 17	at Cunningham tourney (JV)	TBD
Jan. 19-24	Route 54 Classic (V)	TBD
Jan. 27	Argonia	4 p.m.
Jan. 30	Burton	6 p.m.
Feb. 3	Central Christian	4 p.m.
Feb. 6	at Cunningham	4 p.m.
Feb. 10	Stafford	4 p.m.
Feb. 13	at Attica	4 p.m.
Feb. 17	at Pratt Skyline	4 p.m.
Feb. 20	Fairfield	4 p.m.

All games V and JV except as noted

## Girls Basketball Returns Strong Nucleus, Looks to Improve

BY BOB MORRIS  
Sports Editor

**NORWICH GIRLS BASKETBALL**  
**Head coach:** Mike Klaver, 42nd year  
**Record last year:** 14-8  
**Number of players:** 13  
**Key returning players:** Reagan Smith, sr.; Karli Bates, sr.; Leighton Durr, jr.; Jate Samuelson, jr.; Kori Murphy, jr.; Haley Hilger, jr.



BOB MORRIS / Leader-Courier  
Norwich girl's basketball players run passing drills during a recent practice.

The Norwich girl’s basketball team returns what head coach Mike Klaver expects will be a good nucleus as the team looks to make a deeper postseason run.

The Lady Eagles’ season ended in the Sub State semifinals against Meade, a game in which the Lady Eagles didn’t score a lot of points. Klaver said there has been an emphasis on shooting and creating offense in practice.

“We did concentrate on shooting and we’ve been really working on creating shots off the dribble a lot the beginning of the year,” he said. “A lot of emphasis has been placed on upping our offensive output. If we can do that, I think that it will help us greatly. We tend to play pretty good defense, I feel.”

“Then, of course, we need to be able to take care of the ball and lessen turnovers than we did last year. That should help us in that aspect as well.”

Klaver said that the Lady Eagles won’t have a lot of size, so they will have to

play good defense and have good help when the ball is rotated to the middle.

But the good thing is that the players bring good attitudes to practice, he said.

“We think we have a good group that is easy to coach, good to get along with and all of those good things about good quality teams,” Klaver said.

Two seniors are back, Reagan Smith and Karli Bates. Klaver said the two understand the tradition the Lady Eagles have and the expectations that come with that.

“They’re both working hard to improve their chances and minutes on the floor,” he said. “In that aspect, they’re being great senior leaders for us.”

Klaver said there are times when he believes the players

can work harder, such as not jogging when the time calls for sprinting. But he added it’s good to have Smith and Bates back as they bring a lot of experience and work hard.

The juniors will make up the core of the varsity rosters. Two returning starters are Jate Samuelson and Leighton Durr. Other juniors such as Haley Hilger, Kori Murphy, Rachel Balzer and Maddison Lee are expected to contribute as well.

“We have a pretty deep junior class that we’re going to really depend on to provide depth and the things that we need to do to have a great season,” Klaver said.

The Lady Eagles will face

some tough competition to open the season. They will face Belle Plaine on Friday, then open against South Haven in the Border Queen Classic. Norwich will meet South Haven again a week later, along with Udall.

Norwich has added the likes of Reno County and Little River to the schedule and Klaver said those teams will be good challenges. He added that he expects a lot of quality teams at the Route 54 Classic.

“(It’s a) pretty good schedule,” Klaver said. “We’re excited about it. We’re looking forward to the challenge and seeing where the chips may fall.”

Date	Location	Time
Dec. 5	Belle Plaine	4 p.m.
Dec. 9-13	at Border Queen Classic (V)	TBD
Dec. 16	at Udall	4 p.m.
Dec. 19	at South Haven	4 p.m.
Dec. 22	Reno County	4:15 p.m.
Jan. 2	at Little River	4 p.m.
Jan. 6	Caldwell	4 p.m.
Jan. 8	Conway Springs	6 p.m.
Jan. 10	at Cunningham tourney (JV)	TBD
Jan. 13	at South Barber	4 p.m.
Jan. 16	Pretty Prairie	4 p.m.
Jan. 17	at Cunningham tourney (JV)	TBD
Jan. 19-24	Route 54 Classic (V)	TBD
Jan. 27	Argonia	4 p.m.
Jan. 30	Burton	6 p.m.
Feb. 3	Central Christian	4 p.m.
Feb. 6	at Cunningham	4 p.m.
Feb. 10	Stafford	4 p.m.
Feb. 13	at Attica	4 p.m.
Feb. 17	at Pratt Skyline	4 p.m.
Feb. 20	Fairfield	4 p.m.

All games V and JV except as noted

## KINGMAN

• From Page 3B

There are five juniors out: Trent Clark, Boston Beck, Chris Hepburn, Grayson Smith and Evan Wilson. Clark and Smith bring the most varsity experience, having started multiple varsity game last season. Hageman said that Hepburn, who saw some varsity time, has been “probably our best surprise” in the first few days of practice. Beck, who also saw varsity time, has been getting into the mix as well, while

Wilson is pushing for varsity time this season.

The Eagles will have a lot of sophomores out, with two of them, Logan Birkenbaugh and Jaxson Campbell, having seen a lot of varsity time. Hageman said that Levi Gattis could be fighting for minutes at point guard and the other sophomores could be pushing for varsity roles as well.

“We’re excited about where they are three days in,” Hageman said. “They’re going to be a big core in all three phases. Some of them will be playing JV and even

the varsity level. I’m really relying on them to just have a really good season.”

As for the schedule, Hageman said there will be a learning curve and the Eagles will take their lumps at times. But he thinks that the depth and competitiveness of the Eagles will bode well for the short and long term.

“I’m just really proud of our guys and the way that they’ve competed so far — just attacking each day and each practice to try to get better,” he said.

The seniors said they expect

to do good things and improve from last season.

“I have high expectations for our team this year,” Clouse said. “I feel like we have a lot of underclassmen that can play at a high level. I think we’re going to have a pretty good, overall great season.”

### NextEra Energy Classic Set

The NextEra Energy Basketball Classic, formerly known as the Kingman Eagle Classic, will be held the week of Dec. 9-13 at Kingman High School.

On Tuesday, Dec. 9, the

Clearwater girls will play Great Bend at 3 p.m., followed by the boys. At 6 p.m., the Kingman girls will play Meade, followed by the boys.

On Thursday, Dec. 11, the Meade girls will play Sterling at 3 p.m., followed by the boys. At 6 p.m., the Haven girls will play Clearwater, followed by the boys.

On Friday, Dec. 12, the Great Bend girls will play Haven at 3 p.m., followed by the boys. At 6 p.m., the Kingman girls will play Sterling, followed by the boys.

On Saturday, Dec. 13, the

fifth-place games will take place at noon, followed by the third-place games at 3 p.m. and the championship games at 6 p.m. In each case, the girls will play first, then the boys.

A junior varsity tournament will also take place. In each case, the dates and times are the same for the first three days, except the boys play first, followed by the girls. On Saturday, Dec. 13, the times will be determined based on what time varsity teams play, with the boys first, then the girls.

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# CUNNINGHAM

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? Contact Sports Editor Bob Morris at (620) 532-3151 or email bmmorris@kcnonline.com

## Boys Expect to Keep Winning Tradition Going

BY BOB MORRIS  
Sports Editor

The Cunningham boy's basketball team has a State championship and runner-up trophy to its credit from the past two seasons.

The Wildcats also had another deep run in the 6-man football playoffs, culminating in a fourth straight trip to the State title game, which they won for the second time.

Therefore, despite losing three key players to graduation, it should come as no surprise that the Wildcats have heightened expectations.

"I knew coming in last year the expectations were going to be there," said head coach Larry Eisenhauer, now in his second year. "There's not going to be anything left out of expectations. We have the same goals that we did last year, our goal is to go to the State tournament."

"That's what I'm feeding these guys and that's what I expect out of them. I want them to be able to be aware of where we are going and what

### CUNNINGHAM BOYS BASKETBALL

**Record last year:** 25-1  
**Head coach:** Larry Eisenhauer, second year  
**Number of players:** 21  
**Key returning players:** Logan Kinsler, sr.; Dylan Halderson, sr.; Kendall Rogers, sr.; Stephen Kerschen, jr.

they are able to accomplish." The head coach expects to have 21 players out, including those who played football. Eisenhauer said one thing that will help is the returning players know what to expect from him now.

"Being able to go through practice and how we do stuff and what's expected of them is going to be huge," he said. "We have a lot of returners coming back. We have quite a few guys with experience."

"That's going to help us tremendously, especially early on because there's a real possibility that we'll have four practices again with our full squad before our first game."

The Wildcats spent the

summer playing in the Attica basketball league and a couple of MAYB tournaments in Wichita. Eisenhauer said that helped the players to mesh as a team, particularly the younger players.

As for the players who didn't play football, the head coach said they have done good things in practice.

"With these guys not out for football, we wanted to get them, try to get their conditioning at a spot when we do hit the floor full speed with our full squad, then we're ready to go," Eisenhauer said.

Seniors who return to the squad are Logan Kinsler, Dylan Halderson and Kendall Rogers. Two more seniors are out for the first time: Skyler Thimesch and Andrew Schultz, the latter who served as a team manager last season.

Stephen Kerschen is the lone junior, with sophomores and freshmen making up the remainder of the roster.

"We're hoping with some of the seniors that we get some leadership and we get some guys who will get



BOB MORRIS / Leader-Courier

Cunningham boy's basketball warm up before a recent practice.

up," Eisenhauer said. "We'll have some sophomores that played some significant minutes."

"We may, varsity wise, have a handful of freshmen, maybe two or three who are going to get some varsity minutes as well. As the season progresses and they learn the system, there's a possibility."

The Wildcats open the season at Minneola on Friday, then will prepare for the Fairfield Classic Dec. 8-12. They will host Argonia and play at Chaparral in the final games before Christmas break.

### 2025-26 CUNNINGHAM HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

Dec. 5	at Minneola	4 p.m.
Dec. 8-12	at Fairfield Classic (V)	TBD
Dec. 16	Argonia	4 p.m.
Dec. 19	at Chaparral	4 p.m.
Jan. 2	at Canton-Galva	4 p.m.
Jan. 6	Macksville	4 p.m.
Jan. 9	at Kinsley	4 p.m.
Jan. 10	Cunningham tourney (JV)	TBD
Jan. 16	South Barber	4 p.m.
Jan. 17	Cunningham tourney (JV)	TBD
Jan. 19-24	Route 54 Classic (V)	TBD
Jan. 30	Attica	4 p.m.
Feb. 3	at Fairfield	4 p.m.
Feb. 6	Norwich	4 p.m.
Feb. 10	Central Christian	4 p.m.
Feb. 13	at Pratt Skyline	4 p.m.
Feb. 17	at Stafford	4 p.m.
Feb. 20	Pretty Prairie	4 p.m.

All games V and JV except as noted

## Girls Know What to Expect From Coach Walters

BY BOB MORRIS  
Sports Editor

Last season proved to be a challenging one for the Cunningham girl's basketball team, with head coach Kayla Walters missing much of the season because of family issues.

But the fourth-year head coach said that things are going smoother now at the start of practices, with the girls understanding more about what to expect from her.

"These seniors will be my first class here when I was first hired," Walters said. "I really feel like they are getting the concepts that we've put in and we're just like building and building. We're able to go through stuff much faster than we were."

"The freshmen are really picking it up pretty good as well. It's allowing us to kind of keep a good pace to it."

During the summer, the Lady Wildcats played some games against Pratt Skyline, held open gym, took part in a basketball camp and participated in MAYB tournaments in Wichita.

Walters said the girls would also get together to work on some "structured skill development" to learn how to respond to specific situations.

And the head coach is encouraged by what she has

### CUNNINGHAM GIRLS BASKETBALL

**Head coach:** Kayla Walters, fourth year.  
**Record last year:** 7-15  
**Number of players:** 13  
**Key returning players:** Emily Ogg, sr.; Grace Hageman, sr.; Kyra Morgan, sr.; Rylee Miller, jr.; Macy Neufeld, jr.

seen from the girls in practice.

"I think we have some good veteran presence mixed with some young freshman underclassman talent," Walters said. "I think the upperclassmen are doing a good job challenging the younger kids and vice versa."

Senior Kyra Morgan returns to the team as the primary post player. Walters likes what she brings to the table.

"She's really explosive and dynamic, especially when she catches about 15 feet in," Walters said. "She really loves to rip and go at people. She'll be a force when she catches the ball from around that area."

Senior Grace Hageman also returns and will be used as a guard and a forward.

"She's very explosive, loves to rip through, step through people, plays with a great motor, no end to her energy," Walters said. "I'm looking forward to that."



BOB MORRIS / Leader-Courier

The Cunningham girl's basketball team works on its offense and defense during a recent practice.

Senior Emily Ogg is back as well and brings a lot of athleticism.

"She brings a really great defensive presence for us," Walters said. "She sits down in the stance and she's willing to guard."

Junior Rylee Miller also returns. She has handled point guard duties since her freshman year.

"(She's) looking to return to that same role with another level of ability to distribute, but we also want to find her with the ball in her hands a little bit more than we have in the past, give her some opportunities to get out and score," Walters said.

Also returning is junior Macy Neufeld, who brings a soft shot and a strong defen-

sive presence.

"I'd love to find a way to get her a few more shot attempts every game," Walters said.

Junior Gracie Smith brings a lot of energy and basketball IQ and junior Whitney Mead is expected to contribute in the post.

The head coach said she simply expects the Lady Wildcats to be the best version of themselves throughout the season.

"Just comparing what we know we're capable of, that's always our gauge of how successful we've been," Walters said. "I think we have a great opportunity to do some really fun things in the league this year."

Cunningham opens Friday

against Minneola, then heads to the Fairfield Classic Dec. 8-12. The Lady Wildcats will

face Argonia and Chaparral to close out the schedule before Christmas break.

### 2025-26 CUNNINGHAM HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

Dec. 5	at Minneola	4 p.m.
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Feb. 17	at Stafford	4 p.m.
Feb. 20	Pretty Prairie	4 p.m.

All games V and JV except as noted

## Route 54 Classic Tournaments Combined Into One Week

### STAFF REPORT

The Route 54 Classic basketball tournaments, normally held with boys and girls in separate weeks, will be held in the same week this year, the week of Jan. 19-24.

The boys will be at Pratt Skyline this year while the girls will be at Cunningham. The schedule calls for the boys to start play on Monday, with the girls starting on Tuesday. Boys semifinals are set for Thursday, with girls semifinals

on Friday and Saturday will be the last day of the tourney, with games at both sites.

Norwich head boy's basketball coach Nick Kyle, who is now the Norwich athletic director, said his understanding is the change happened because KSHSAA expanded the regular-season schedule for all teams from 20 to 23 games.

He said the intent was to give teams more opportunities to schedule those extra games, allowing

schools to schedule boys and girls on the same night.

"That definitely helped with that and allowed for us to add a couple of games to our schedule, like Reno County, Argonia and Conway Springs," Kyle said.

Norwich head girl's basketball coach Mike Klaver said it will be good to ensure teams don't have a week without any games, as was sometimes the case when the tournaments were held separate weeks.

"I didn't like that blank week very much," he said. "We'll see what happens. Kids love to play, so they won't hate it."

Cunningham head boy's basketball coach Larry Eisenhauer said the change should be good. He noted the Wildcats have added teams such as Chaparral and Canton-Galva, both teams that will provide a challenge.

Cunningham head girl's basketball coach Kayla Walters said, not

only is it exciting for Cunningham to host the girls side this year, the additional games will be good for the players.

"Expanding the games just allows us a little bit more freedom to get some more touches on the ball, get more kids playing, so it's good," she said.

Kyle said he expects both Route 54 Classic tournaments to be competitive, particularly with so many of teams being young last year.

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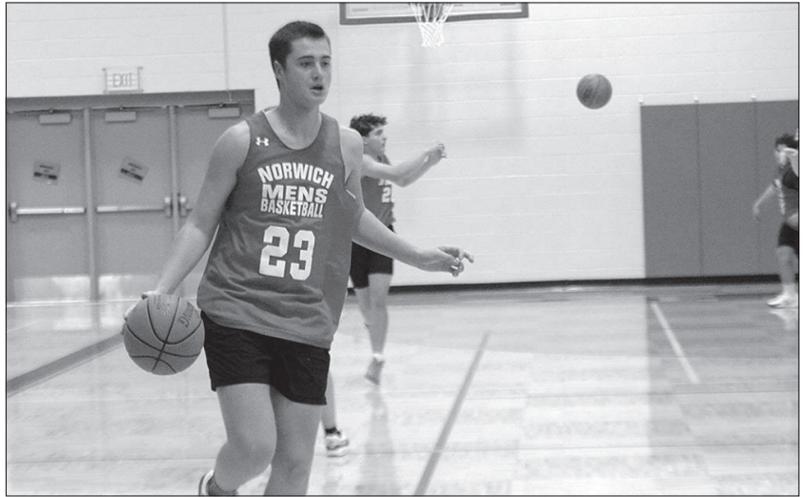
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# WINTER SPORTS PREVIEW

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## County Basketball Teams Prepare for Season



# WINTER SPORTS PREVIEW

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