

A Look At The South Central League Clubs

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The Wynot Expos will look to defend their South Central League title and the Crofton Bluejays will seek a second consecutive state Class B championship as the 2012 SCL season begins Sunday night.

Here is a look at the 10 teams in the SCL. Yankton is listed first, with the remaining nine listed in alphabetical order.

Yankton Tappers

Minus the middle of the lineup, the Tappers bring almost everybody back from last season's team that finished second in the conference standings.

The goal now is to contend for a Class A state championship.

"I'd like to think we can compete for the SCL title," said co-manager Ross Heine, who will help his father, Ron, run the team. "With our staff, I honestly think we could make a deeper run at state than we ever have; maybe be in the mix for a championship."

Yankton will be without sluggers Zach Lambrechts, Andy Turbak and Rand Thygeson, but the Tappers will otherwise feature recognizable names.

Back this season are Trey Krier (P/DH), Jason Livermont (2B), Mathias Godsil (OF), Mike Thunker (P), Jared Miller (1B), Robb McClemons (IF), Jake Broscha (P), Jesse Bailey (P),

Derrick Nelson (IF/P), Jason Nelson (OF), Mark Vig (IF), Mark Ryken (OF) and Ross Heine (3B).

A handful of those players were members of the Mount Marty College team that recently advanced to the NAIA Opening Round Tournament for the second time in three seasons.

"We lost the heart of our lineup, but with some of those new guys having another year under their belt, especially those Mount Marty guys, we should be fine," Ross Heine said.

The Tappers will again rely on a deep pitching staff that includes Derrick Nelson, Krier, Thunker, Adam McVay, Brian Bartlett, Jesse Bailey, Jake Broscha and newcomer Josh Engquist.

Last season, Yankton led the league in runs allowed per game (4.8), however this year for the first time, those pitchers will face wood bats — a change instituted for this season, replacing aluminum bats for Class B teams.

"With wood bats, it evens the playing field for us, so I think we're all excited to see how our pitchers perform," Heine said.

Joining the Tappers this summer will be Dillon Lambley, Josh Cleveland, Travis Devine, Heath Arens, Devin Gullikson, Tyler Pekarek and Engquist.

Yankton, the only Class A team in the South Central League, can strive for two goals this summer, Heine said. Not only can the Tappers compete for a league title, they can look



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forward to hosting the first round of the State A Tournament at Riverside Field.

"We're still a young team, so we've got an advantage that way," Heine said. "It's a struggle because a lot of our players are coaches for younger teams, so we'll just have to make due with what we have for every game."

Avon Bards

With one year in the South Central League under their belt, the Bards are looking to improve on last season's 7-11 record.

A collection of newcomers figure to provide some pitching depth, manager Joe Sees said.

Avon will rely on the arms of Logan Tycz, Nate Harrington, Matt Eggers, Bill Roach and Sees. Not returning to the team this season is Josh Wagner.

"We've added a little bit of pitching," Sees said. "We'll miss Josh, but I think we'll be a little stronger defensively. Hopefully we can hit the ball better, but it's tough to say with wood bats how that will turn out."

Among the other players for Avon this season are Chris Broz (IF), Dan Bures (C), Joey Cuka (IF/C), Matt Dykstra (OF), Jeff Haenfler (IF/C), Jesse Hajek (OF), Cash Kocer (OF), Jordan Kocer (OF), Justin Lukkes (IF), Jeff Sands (IF/OF), Jeff Tolsma (OF) and Matt Yost (IF).

"We have some new guys coming in with some experience, so that should help us out," Sees said. "Some of the guys haven't played the game in a couple of years, but they should be good additions."

Now that those returners have gotten to know the SCL and its pitchers, the Bards are ready to make the climb into the league's elite.

"It's always helpful if you know about the pitchers you're going to face, so that should be a nice benefit for us," Sees said. "Some of the guys last year, who hadn't played in a while, now have that year under their belt."

Crofton Bluejays

Two years ago, the Bluejays lost in the state championship game. Last summer, however, they put it all together and came away with their first state title since 1972.

Now, can they do it again? "You can never beat the feeling of winning," said manager Carl Schieffer, also the team's catcher. "When you finally win the big one, some of the guys go into a mode of not being as hungry."

"At some point, you're still out there to win and have fun, but you don't want to lose that main goal."

Crofton will be without long-time infield starters Chad Guenther and Tony Guenther, obviously leaving a hole in an otherwise intact group.

"Since 2002, those two have been a fixture, so it'll definitely be a change for us," Schieffer said. "Not very many teams can say they had the same two infielders for that long."

Back again for the Bluejays will be Joe Wiebelhaus (IF), Scot Donner (SS/P), Bill Guenther (P/IB), Mike Sturm (P/IF), Seth Erdmann (P/OF), Aaron Loring (LF), Nick Hegge (CF), Kyle Mueller (RF), Trevor Arens (P/IF), Tanner Foxhoven (P/OF) and Schieffer.

The pitching staff will again rely on Donner, Erdmann and Sturm, to log more innings. Crofton will also benefit from the addition of Rand Thygeson, a former pitcher and slugger for the Yankton Tappers.

The Bluejays got an early test this season as they held off a fitness scare from Stateline League newcomer Beresford.

Perhaps that's the kind of challenge the defending state champions needed, Schieffer said.

"It takes a couple games, and I think you build hunger that way," he said.

Freeman Black Sox

With the new season quickly approaching, Freeman, who finished 7-11 in the SCL last summer, will be facing a slew of changes to the roster which will be a big impact on the Black Sox

game plan.

"There's going to be a lot of changes this year. There are a lot of guys not playing anymore and we bring in a lot of new guys," first-year manager Brett Scherschligt said.

Along with several other positions to fill, potentially the most difficult spot to replace will be former long-time manager Eric Hortness (IF/P) who moved to Madison and will be playing ball there this season.

"Eric was our manager and played pitcher and short stop for us," Scherschligt said. He is a pretty big loss because he threw a lot of innings for us. He leaves a big hole but I think we can handle it."

Two new players on the Black Sox's young, inexperienced roster that will have an immediate impact are Lee Scherschligt and Brandon Deffenbauth.

"Lee will get a lot of innings in for us," Scherschligt said.

"Brandon will hopefully swing like we know he can and put some runs up for us. We've got a lot of young guys that can step up and make things happen."

With the loss of Hortness, Freeman hopes to focus on their pitching and, most importantly, keeping a positive outlook with all of the new changes taking place.

"We will just have to keep a positive attitude," Scherschligt said. "Our pitching has an opportunity to be better so as long as we can keep everybody healthy who's pitching."



AVON BARDS | JOE SEES



YANKTON TAPPERS | ROSS HEINE

Wood Bat

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"I'm a catcher, so I don't have the shots coming at me, but I know they're coming hard," Schieffer said. "Has it become a huge concern lately? I don't think so. I don't think we've seen more injuries the last few years as we did before."

"I didn't think it had to be addressed, but it was, and we'll go with it."

As the SCL begins on Sunday, teams will likely need some time to adjust to the new sticks,

Irene's Johnke said.

"At first I didn't care for it at all, but we've had a few practices now to get used to them," he said. "I don't think it's a bad decision, it'll just take some getting used to."

You can follow Jeremy Hoek on Twitter at twitter.com/jhoeck.

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