

## Golden Eagles look to add to 13-win boys soccer season

By Sean Douglas

In 2019, the Oak Hill Golden Eagles put together their best season in the Joel Garverick era.

Led by a group of tremendous senior leaders, with talent up and down the pitch, the Golden Eagles finished with a 13-4-1 record, their best record since the 2016-2017 campaign.

All of those players, which included starting goalkeeper Sam Boyer, striker Gavin Holz, and midfielders Thommy Seybold, have graduated, leaving behind a void not only in skill, but in leadership as well.

However, with a number of key players returning, the Golden Eagles should still be every bit as competitive in the 2020 season.

“Any time you have that many seniors – 10 seniors – it creates a huge wealth of leadership and role models for the younger guys to look up to and follow,” Garverick said. “One of the things we will have to do is replace some of that, and hope that some of the younger guys who have been watching are ready to step up into a different role.”

While preparations have begun for the 2020 season, the offseason has looked remarkably different for the Golden Eagles.

With schools shutting down in March and with all other aspects of life seemingly halted until early July, offseason preparation has been unlike anything that Oak Hill, or any other team in Grant County, has ever experienced.

In the early stages of the offseason, Garverick’s and the team’s main focus has been on conditioning, working to get back into game shape after an extended period of time off.

“Usually, you come to workouts in June, and kids are mostly at the same level condition-wise because they played a spring sport. They have a certain level of conditioning,” Garverick said. “This year, it’s really different, because they didn’t have spring sports. When we are doing soccer workouts or conditioning, you can really see a difference between kids that have put in the work and the kids who haven’t. A lot of those kids do have some work to make up some ground, but at the same time, it’s really cool to see the kids who have put in a lot of work.”

Along with conditioning, the team has been working on tuning the fundamentals, which include shooting, dribbling, and passing.

While Oak Hill lost a plethora of great players, there have plenty of returners with the ability to fill those voids.

With losses in both the midfield and the back line, Clayton Macy, who performed at a high level during his junior campaign, will be asked to play a much bigger role this coming season. Macy finished with six goals and one assist in 2019.

“Clayton, even last year, was one of our top players. He might have flown under the radar quite a bit... but he was just a really, key cog of our midfield that we really relied on,” Garverick said. “We are going to put the weight of our team on his shoulders in the midfield, so he is going to be a huge part of what we do.”

With the departure of Holz, who led the team with 22 goals a season ago, Dalian Leach, who was second on the team last season with 16 tallies, will be relied even more offensively in his senior campaign.

“Dalian is going to have to score a bunch of goals,” Garverick said. “He scored a bunch last year, but he’s going to have to do even more this year trying to replace guys like Gavin and Brody, who scored and assisted quite a bit.”

After a successful freshman campaign in which he tallied three assists, sophomore



Defender Corey Griffin heads the ball against Eastbrook.

midfielder Weston Seybold is expected, like Macy, to take on more responsibility in the midfield.

And while Garverick has been pleased with all of his players and the strides they’ve made, he has been thoroughly impressed with Seybold’s development.

“I really expect Weston Seybold to make a big jump,” Garverick said. “I’ve been incredibly impressed with his work ethic and his consistency and his discipline over the last six months. He is going to be a big part of what we do.”

If fall sports do continue as scheduled, Oak Hill will open their season against Tip-ton on Aug. 18.

## After historic season, Mississinewa strives for continued success

By Sean Douglas

In Jared Reel’s second season at the helm of the Mississinewa boys soccer program, the Indians achieved new heights and rousing success in 2019.

Their nine wins were the most in a single season in program history, and every player who saw playing time on the pitch made tremendous strides throughout the course of last fall.

“We definitely had a very successful season last year,” Reel said. “We had some of the best team chemistry that I have had as a head coach. I tried to make sure no matter the score [was] or how we were playing, no one was allowed to hang their head. My players bought into this philosophy, which kept us positive and always fighting for the win in many games.”

On the heels of their most successful season to date, COVID-19 reared its ugly head, and subsequently, all area schools closed in March. As a result, the Indians had to drastically change their offseason approach.

“I believe COVID-19 effected my incoming freshman more than my upper class-

men,” Reel said. “My freshmen missed out on their 8th grade spring soccer season where I planned on teaching them more of my playing system and philosophies. We missed out on about five-six weeks of summer training.”

Furthermore, teams were not able to hold any sort of June workouts or take part in any summer soccer camps, meaning the first time the team was able to get together was July 6 – the first day that teams across the state could start practicing for the fall season.

During the shutdown, however, the Indians continued to put the work in, with Reel providing drills and skills for his players to practice.

“I held weekly Google meet meetings to keep in contact with my players, Reel said. “I provided my players with a 4-5-week program to work on their foot skills. I was able to contact a club coach and use some of his videos so the kids could see how-to videos. It definitely is showing for those who were doing the workouts, and it helped me hold some kids accountable to see who was doing the conditioning and foot work.”

In the early stages of the offseason, Reel has been pleased with attendance, stating that it has been excellent over the course of the first week, and with the improvement that his players have already made.

“We have been focusing on technical aspects of our play,” Reel said. “[We have been] working on foot skills but have added some tactical playing aspects I want to be able to instill this season. I always like to do some scrimmaging during the summer-time, but we have not been able to do that due to COVID-19. The bright side to this is that we will get more time on the field the last two weeks of the summer that normally we wouldn’t get. So our off season conditioning will be ramped up more this summer than prior years.”

Unlike many of the teams in Grant County, the Indians did not experience a huge amount of roster turnover, losing just three seniors. More importantly, the Indians bring back most of their key contributors.

Colin Yoder (29 goals, eight assists), the leading goal scorer in Mississinewa history, and Holden Brown (17 goals, 13 assists), the all-time leader in assists, will be back

leading the charge offensively. Hayden Ul-erick, who made tremendous strides throughout the season, will be counted on for his defensive prowess, while Josh O’Donnell will continue to lead an ever-improving group of defenders on the back line. Furthermore, the Indians added former Marion Giant Zane Scott to help shore up the midfield.

Even more exciting for the Indians is their incoming group of freshmen, one that Reel called “the most talented class of players that Mississinewa has seen.”

Mason Reel, Elliot Williams, Ian Davis, Micah Sylte, and Adrian Jeter, one of the first groups developed in Reel’s soccer program, will each play significant roles for the Indians in the 2020 season.

On paper, the Indians easily have one of their most talented rosters in program history, and with the work they have put in, Reel believes this team has a chance to make a lot of noise this coming season.

Mississinewa is scheduled to open its season on Aug. 20 on the road against the Wabash Apaches.

## Trio look to lead Giants boys soccer team in 2020

By Sean Douglas

Behind an electric offense that featured a host of players who could put the ball in the back of the net, the Marion Giants put forth another solid season in 2019, finishing with a 9-8 record before falling to NCC rival Logansport in their first sectional contest.

Along with all the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, the Giants will face a daunting challenge of replacing 13 seniors, including co-leading goal scorer Kevin Guy, a pair of strong midfielders in Isak Lagerkvist and Joseph Powell, and goalkeeper Garrett Scher.

However, with a plethora of talent returning, including JD Fagan, Kyle Coryea, and Alex Powell, the Giants will look on last year’s success and carry it over in the 2020 campaign, if indeed there is one.

COVID-19 has directly affected the sports world since February of this year. Among other things, all normal offseason routines and workouts were pushed back due to the seriousness of the virus.

The team first gathered on July 6, and practice sessions have certainly been different due to COVID guidelines.

In all, about 20 players have showed up consistently to workouts, and coach Jorge Berry has been pleased with the progress he has seen.

“(Attendance) has been slowly increasing, which is good,” Berry said. “I have seen some kids there who have really grown physically and have gotten stronger just by doing the things we have asked them to do. And it shows.”

As is the case at all the other schools around the county and the state, conditioning has been the number one priority for the Giants in the early stages of the offseason.

“Right now, we really can’t have contact, so we’ve been doing a lot of conditioning and skills work,” Berry said. “We are working on developing skills.”

Losing a player the caliber of Guy is a negative for the Giants, but they have plenty of skilled offensive players that can make up for his production. Fagan (11

goals, eight assists), Coryea (six goals, eight assists), and Alex Powell (seven goals, one assist) have all shown goal-scoring capabilities throughout their time with the Giants, and that production should only continue in 2020.

“With JD and Kyle, and throw Alex in the mix, we’ll have three guys there who are capable of scoring 10 plus goals,” Berry said.

Powell, in particular, has really impressed Berry, and the Giants’ head coach, heading into his 15th season at the helm, believes big things are in store for the Marion sophomore.

“Alex Powell is a phenomenal player,” Berry said. “He started as a freshman last year, and you can see just how much more physically stronger he has gotten.”

Malik Smith, who struggled with injuries last season, will be the Giants’ primary goalkeeper in 2020, while other players like Tyson Johnson and Abdi Steenberg will be relied on to play bigger roles.

Marion will begin their season on the road against Fort Wayne Snider on

## Panthers ...cont. from Pg. 7

really good team players. We have a couple of guys that are phenomenal, but a lot of it is going to be guys...learning their roles – learning where they are and where they fit.”

The back line was where Eastbrook was hit the hardest, as all three of their top players graduated. Hallis will depend on juniors Joseph Kerton-Johnson, Cody Wilson, and Charlie Steele to step into those positions and perform at a high level.

Over the next few weeks, Hallis will continue to evaluate, filling the voids in his lineup with the best possible combinations.

During the few times he has met with his players, Hallis has been pleased with the connection they are already showing with one another.

“The biggest thing I see in the limited contact I have had is how much chemistry there is,” Hallis said. “This is a group of guys that [are having fun,] as much fun as you can have right now. I think it’s going to be good.”

Eastbrook is scheduled to open its season Aug. 19 against Wabash.