

Crites big hole to fill for Bearcat linksters

Written by Jim Metcalfe

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By JIM METCALFE

Staff Writer

jmetcalfe@delphosherald.com

SPENCERVILLE — Spencerville head golf coach Mike Harmon has turned the Bearcats into a consistently solid team in his previous eight years at the helm, building a 129-70 overall mark (89-47 in the Northwest Conference).

That includes last fall's runner-up unit that ended up 16-2 in the league (23-4 overall) behind the now-departed Lima Central Catholic Thunderbirds.

However, this Division III crew won't have four-year leader Evan Crites to build around.

"The loss of Evan to graduation is huge. He was Player of the Year in the NWC last year (first-teamer in 2011) with an average of 37.2 for nine holes, so his score will be tough to replace," Harmon noted. "However, the other guys have stepped up so far this year to soften the blow a little."

Crites was the sole departure due to graduation, though one other would-be veteran chose not to come back out in 2013.

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Four players are back from 2012, led by fourth-year senior and top returnee James Schaad (46.3), third-year junior Chance Campbell (46.6) and veteran sophomores Mitchell Youngpeter (47) and Keaton Gillispie (65).

Harmon also has one more option than last season's six-man roster — this crew has seven — but the rest of the unit has freshmen: Brian Wood, Parker Campbell and Austin Keiber.

"All of our new guys are promising. Brian has been playing golf for a few years now and spent a lot of time working on his game this summer," Harmon continued. "We need the freshmen to step up and help us get that fourth score.

"Our strength is our desire to get better and learn the game. Our top guys worked pretty hard this summer and want to be the best. Each golfer on the team has his own individual strengths, which we hope to continue to improve on. We also have good team chemistry."

Still, with a few new guys, Harmon knows there are things to address.

"We will work a lot on the basics and rules of the game. There is always room for improvement in everyone's short game, so that will be a big one for everybody; they need to work on getting chip shots closer and staying away from 3-putts," Harmon added. "Most high-school golfers really need to work on course management, so we will focus on improving that as well and getting the guys to make good decisions on the golf course. We are working on some swing changes and consistency with the guys. Putting will be a big focus this year.

"Our goal is to win every time we play but play the game properly and with etiquette. I expect us to win in every match. Our goal is to win the conference. I think we have a good chance to get out of sectionals this year."

With his own team, Allen East, Bluffton and Lincolnview his picks for the top of the competitive NWC, Harmon has set some high goals for 2013.

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“Any guy on our team has the potential to surprise this year. The older guys have improved quite a bit and should surprise some of our competition with some impressive scores; the younger guys are improving every day and could be shooting pretty good numbers by year’s end,” he added. “I am excited for this season. Our guys are playing well out of the gate this year and I expect them to continue to get better. I think we have a strong chance at winning the conference and doing well in the postseason.

“Finding a good fourth score will be crucial to how successful we are.”

Another step in that direction will be at the Columbus Grove tri-match (Country Acres) Friday morning.