Written by Mark Jaeger
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Shortage of players forces administration to put program on shelf

The Ozaukee High School baseball team has fielded its last ground ball, at least for the coming season.

High School Principal Kevin Parker told the Northern Ozaukee School Board last week that the team's upcoming season has been cancelled because of a lack of players.

Two years ago, the baseball program dropped out of the Central Lakeshore Conference and switched to a spring season, with games scheduled in April and May.

At the time, coach John Tucker explained that many of the players said the traditional summer program interfered with summer jobs.

The change was not enough to lure new blood into the program.

Last season, the team started with 15 players, none of them are seniors this year.

When a team sign up was conducted earlier this year, only 10 students expressed interest in the program.

Two of those would-be players reportedly changed their minds about playing on the team when they realized it would be a rebuilding year for a program with so many young players. Nine players are needed to field a full team.

Parker made the decision to cancel the program, and sent letters to the players and their families last week.

“The purpose of this letter is to officially notify you that Ozaukee will not have a spring baseball team for the 2010 season,” Parker wrote.

“As the spring season is rapidly approaching, it was necessary to make a final decision regarding our baseball team. I have decided not to chance calling the season after the season has begun.

“It is with great sadness that I make this call, but I do believe at this time given our circumstances, it is the right call to make.”

Parker said he intends to hold a meeting with players and their families in the next few weeks to talk about the prospects for the program.

Families of middle-school students who might be interested in playing baseball at the school in the future will also be invited to the meeting.

According to Parker, the team could resume play next season if the WIAA is notified early enough.

Even without the cancellation, this promised to be a year of transition for the baseball program because Tucker had already announced he was stepping down after nine years as coach.

He remains a science teacher at Ozaukee High, but decided to become the junior varsity baseball coach at Grafton High School.

Assistant coach Bob Kiefer has been slated to take over the OHS varsity program.

Tucker said he chose to resign in November, after reflecting on what had been a difficult season.

“I left last season recognizing the need to change. I was pretty tough on the team, and if there is a need to place the blame on someone for not having kids turn out, I guess it has to rest with me,” Tucker said.

He said he accepted the Grafton largely because of the opportunity to coach his grandson, who is a member of the JV squad.

Last season, the Warriors finished with a 9-13 record, playing as an independent without a conference affiliation.

The team’s final game was a 9-6 loss to Horicon in a WIAA Division 3 regional quarterfinal contest.

Tucker said he is confident that was not the last ball game the Warriors will play.

“I pray that the baseball program is back next year, and I will do whatever I can to make that happen,” he said.

“I know when I leave school at 3:30 (p.m.), it is going to be painful not to see kids playing on the diamond.”

NOBODY WILL BE hurling fastballs from the pitcher’s mound for Ozaukee High School this season, as Alex Janke did for the team last year. The Warriors’ varsity baseball program has been suspended for the year because of a lack of players. Press file photo