

JUNIATA MENNONITE BOYS SOCCER

Plenty of talent returns to help Lions to next level

By **KENNY VARNER**

Sentinel correspondent

McALISTERVILLE — After losing just one player due to graduation last year, the future for the Juniata Mennonite boys soccer team looks very bright under second-year coach Kurtis Wagner.

The Lions lost only one senior in Jessie Watts, who will be back on the sideline to help coach the team this season.

“Last year we had senior and the next to highest grade level was sophomore,” Wagner noted. “We have a much more veteran team than last year.”

Wagner will be looking to a group of returners to lead the way.

“Tony Gehman was our leading scorer last year. He scored 27 goals for us last year. He is a very important person coming back for us this year,” Wagner added. “Some other important returners coming back for us is this season are goalkeeper Jacob Metz. He played really well for us last year — it was the first year he played goalkeeper for us.”

And Wagner should know the ins and outs of that position.

“I played goalkeeper in high school and college so I favor that and make sure that is something that’s shored up. So I am counting on Jacob to do pretty well for us this year,” Wagner said. “He’s got the basics down for goalkeeping and he comes out for the ball and is willing to dive for the ball. Sometimes those are things younger goalkeepers and younger guys are tentative to do.”

Another youngster Wagner has high hopes for will be in front of Metz.

“Garrett Hicks was our



Sentinel photo by TABITHA GOODLING

Members of the Juniata Mennonite boys soccer team are, from left, front, Bradigan Davis, Justin Fuller, Trent Smeltz, Liam McCommons, Lance Brubaker, Clayton Smeltz, Sam Taylor, Nehemiah Courtney and Ashton Martin; back, Tommy Allen, James Fuller, Caleb King, Jacob Smeltz, Garrett Hicks, Frank Allen, Hunter Byler and Isaac Rudy. Tony Gehman and Adrian Martin also are team members.

stopper last year, I expect him to step up. Garrett will be a 10th grader this year,” he said.

Also on Wagner’s radar for special fetes are two 11th graders. “I am hoping (Caleb King) will step up this year and continue to play well. He played well last year,” Wagner said. “We have a new 11th grader; his name is Adrian Martin. I think he will play a pretty significant role for us. We basically have a couple players that will continue to get better.”

There haven’t been too many surprises for the second-year coach but there have been two players that he was caught off guard with.

“Two guys have surprised me so far. One has improved a lot over the summer. Tommy Allen has improved his touch a lot and another has been

Sam Taylor,” Wagner said. “The things I am seeing are not surprises but what is expected growth and improvements, they are getting older they are improving and getting more experience.”

Wagner believes that some of the fortunes that might have gone against the Lions might equal out and point their direction this year, and he counts on improved conditioning to help that happen.

“Honestly, we had some favorable results last year that could have gone either way. This year I am hoping to have results that turn in our favor and go the way they should go,” he said. “My personal goal is to end up close to where we were last year. Our team goal is to reach the playoffs.”

A tie kept the Lions out of the postseason a year ago.

AT A GLANCE

JUNIATA MENNONITE LIONS

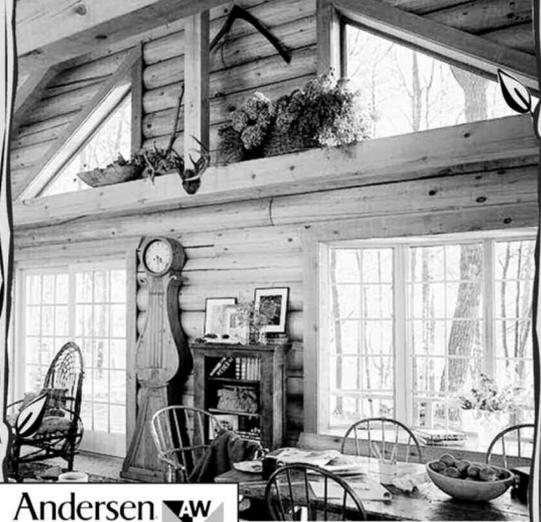
Allegheny Christian Athletic Association

Coach: Kurtis Wagner, assisted by Tommy Dressler and Jesse Watts

2012: 11-5-3, 6-5-2 ACAA

“We are in the Eastern Division and we have four teams against two in the western Division in the playoffs,” Wagner explained. “Last season, Sunbury Christian Academy was strong and Columbia County Christian was pretty good. But we are hoping to surpass them and get wins this year where we had ties last year.”

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