

Ironmen inexperienced on mound but hope to hit and play good defense

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Correspondent

Cherryville baseball coach Henry Jones is not playing games with the opposition when he describes his 2005 squad as "inexperienced."

A quick look at the roster reveals the depth of the Ironmen's graduated losses: both starting pitchers (Chris Christensen and Steven Justice), the starting catcher (Josh Glover) and two infielders.

"We basically lost the middle of our team on defense," said Jones, who is entering his 32nd year as the Ironmen's head coach. "We are going to be inexperienced at pitching, and we have to fill in some holes defensively. What we have to do is play defense and hit the ball, and hope the pitching will come along a bit later."

Despite his tale of woe, it is unlikely that any team on Cherryville's schedule sympathizes with the veteran coach. The Ironmen (21-6 overall, 11-1 conference) are still among the short list of teams to beat in the Southern Foothills 1A Conference this spring.

And while the graduation losses are formidable, Cherryville has enough veterans and talented newcomers on hand to continue the school's tradition of excellent baseball.

The biggest question mark on the team is pitching, where Jones must find some arms to replace two of the area's top prep pitchers last year in Christensen (11-1, 1.26 ERA, 117 strikeouts) and Justice (8-4, 1.68 ERA, 97 strikeouts).

The only returning player with any pitching experience of note is Jeremy Craft, whom Jones estimates worked "about 10 innings" in 2004.

"We have about five people throw-

ing, none with much experience. We don't have any overpowering pitcher right now. It will be pitching by committee," Jones said.

While the young pitching staff goes through the maturing process, the Ironmen must rely on defense and hitting.

Among the top hitters coming back are senior third baseman **Brock Alexander** (.324, five homers and 27 RBI) and first baseman **Trent Thornburg** (.348, no homers and nine RBI).

Another player who will be counted on to produce at the plate is DH **Steven Hoyle**, who blossomed into a top hitter during the second half of the 2004 season after recovering from an injury.

Unfortunately, Hoyle is battling the effects of another injury, this one a knee problem that surfaced during the football season last fall.

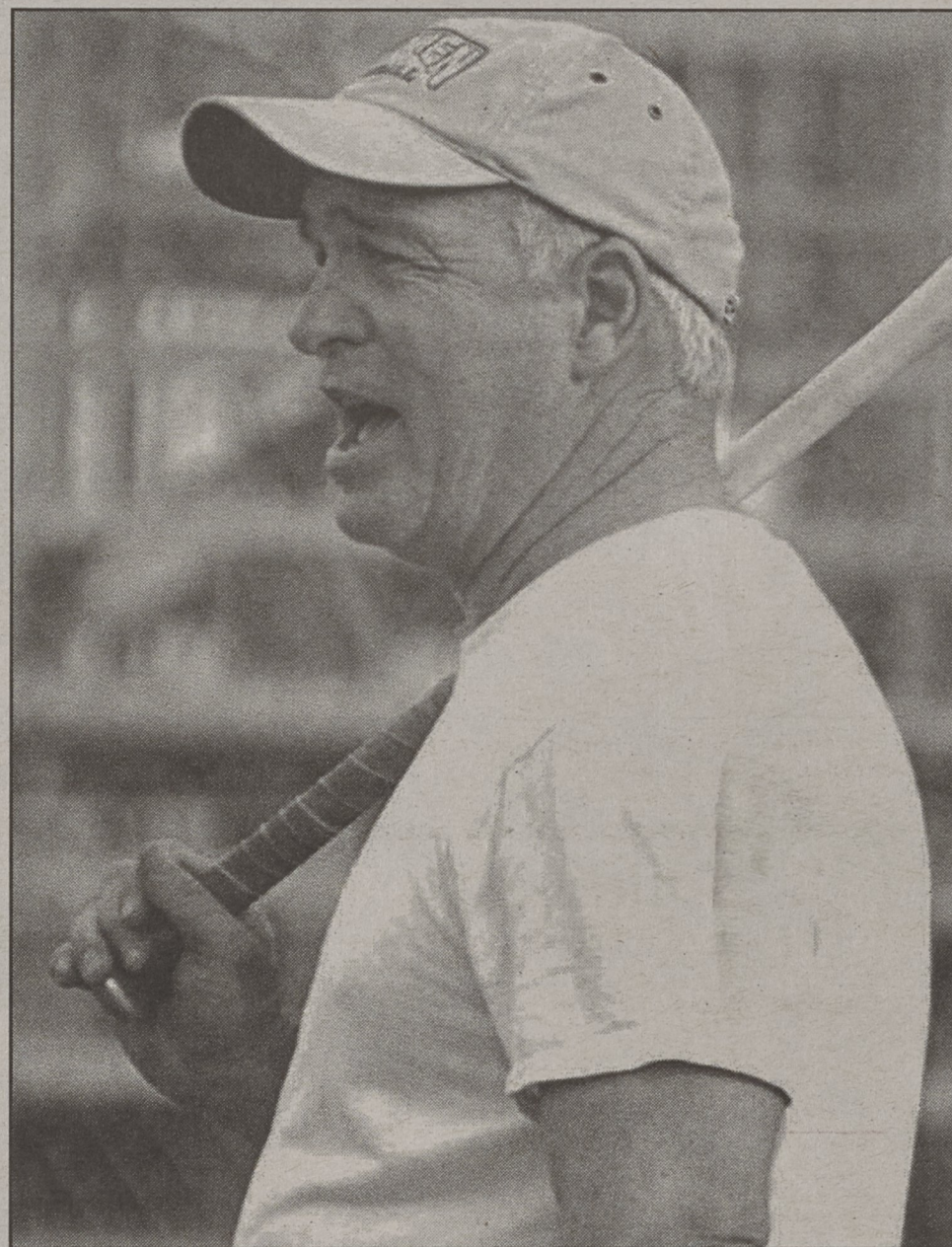
However, Jones said Hoyle is "in better shape now than he was at any time last year."

Other returning players with varsity experience are right fielder **Jarred Fuller** (.306, one homer and 16 RBI), **Matt Oakers** (DH, infield), and **Tyler Beam** (infield).

Among the newcomers who may contribute are **Tripp McSwain** (infield), **Al Benson** (outfield) and **Brian Gardo**, all up from the jayvees.

At the time of the interview, Jones was awaiting the arrival of several players from Cherryville's playoff-bound boys basketball team. They include **Alexander**, **Anthony Miranda**, **Kalem Johnson**, **Cameron Lovelace** and **Daniel Martin**. Johnson and Lovelace are both freshmen, but they

See Ironmen, Page 3



Henry Jones is entering his 32nd season as head coach at Cherryville High School.



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**Good Luck Cherryville Ironmen
in the 2005 Season!**