

Sports

Bowling team reloads for second season

BY RICK HAYES

SENTINEL SPORTS STAFF

MT. VERNON — With five bowlers returning — three with experience — from Mt. Vernon Township High School's initial season as a bowling team, it's reloading time for the Rams.

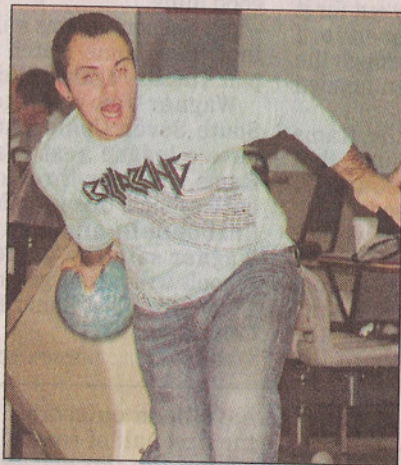
Mt. Vernon's boys' team opens the season this weekend in a tournament at Collinsville.

An all-senior squad is led by returnees John Beckham, Alex Bronson, Michael Olson, Josh Reeves and southpaw Shawn Jones.

Beckham and Reeves were both regular starters on the team a year ago.

"This year, I expect both of them to be shooting about 270, as an average," said coach Dave Wagner. "I expect the other ones to carry a 175 to 180 average. That's what I would love to see."

Please see **Bowling**, Page 2B



Sentinel Photo/RICK HAYES

RARING BACK — Mt. Vernon Township High School senior Tyler Knox makes his approach on the lane during a practice session Wednesday at Nu-Bowl Lanes. Knox is one of 12 seniors on the school's bowling team.

Bowling:

Continued From Page 1B

The squad is rounded out by Shane Hiatt, Tyler Knox, Mike Phillips, Michael Cooper, Robbie Wilkie, Eric Donnellan and Chris Milburn. Cooper and Phillips will join the remaining returnees to make up the team that will compete at Collinsville.

Wagner based that decision on practice bowl-offs.

"They had a three-game rolloff and I told them the top seven would go. Based on the scores, those are the ones chosen," Wagner explained. "Beckham shot a 609 and Jones came in around 570. Those are respectable scores."

Wagner was excited when he held tryouts earlier this fall. Over 40 boys attended tryouts with Wagner keeping 22 on the varsity and JV squads. There was a good turnout of girls, too. Last year, there were nine who tried out and eight were seniors. This year, 16 females showed up for tryouts with Wagner keeping seven on the varsity and nine of the JV team.

"There was a lot of interest, and that's good," said Wagner. "The enthusiasm for bowling is up. It's very, very good. I'm happy to see it. They need another sport that they can do. Just about anybody can try out for it and this is a good avenue. I think this is a sport through the high school that's been needed for quite sometime."

Despite the fact the Rams have an all-senior squad, that doesn't necessarily equate to success, Wagner warned.

"It will take a little while," Wagner said for the Rams to compete with high school teams such as Herrin and Salem, who have been the benchmarks for Southern Illi-

nois schools.

"I've got some good players on my JV team that are freshmen and sophomores that I'll be able to pull up. I'm looking forward to seeing them coming up the ranks," Wagner said, noting the underclassmen won't be pressed into a stressful situation by elevating them to the varsity level.

"Bowling requires a lot of practice and I want them practicing hitting just the 10 pin or the seven pin, learning the different shots and practicing those is very important. Attitude is very important. If they start beating themselves up, they're talking themselves out of the next shot. A lot of times you've got to sit a kid down and let them think a little bit. Then you can bring them back in and they're fine," Wagner explained in describing the intangibles that make a good bowler.

The girls' squad is also composed of nothing but seniors, with Jeanette Odle the only returning starter.

Remaining team members are Alicia Yates, Katie Bunting, Courtney Staples, Ashley Garrison, Miranda Smith and Chelsea Beaty.

"I'm really happy to see the interest is still there," Wagner said. "During the summer, the kids were still coming out to practice because they want to be on the team. That was a good thing."

Mt. Vernon's teams will have their first home match at 3:30 p.m. Tuesday against Herrin.

Wagner also reported the South Seven Conference will have a league next year. The Rams will play three conference schools this year, Marion, Carbondale and Centralia. Wagner said the conference schools will have a get-together 1 p.m. Dec. 13 at Banks Bowl in Centralia.

mtvsports@morningsentinel.com