



Heart River back for more

Heart River softball preparing for another solid run

By Gaylon Wm. Parker

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This is the second in a multi-part series pertaining to spring sports like baseball, softball and track & field.

Duplicating a season like the 2025 installment for the Heart River Cougars is going to be a tall order, but the team remained mostly intact and continues to build on a program that nearly punched their ticket to the North Dakota Class B State Softball Tournament last May. After a third-place finish in the very deep Region 4 standings, Heart River didn't require a play-in game and rolled straight into the first round with a 20-4 win over #6 Wilton-Wing before falling twice the next day on

May 23 in Minot, 5-4 to Velva/Drake-Anamoose in a 5-4 nailbiter and to Harvey-Wells County, 8-4 later that evening.

While that two-game set ended the Cougars' season at 12-4, that doesn't dampen the hopes of head coach Emily Henson, who will be welcoming back a host of returning starters to a team stocked with tons of future talent. Aubrey Roberts is the team's lone senior, and she is joined by fellow upperclassmen Taylin Jahner, Gretchen Silbernagel and Kylie Wyman.

"The seniors we lost will be missed, obviously, but I think we have some young ones who are up-and-coming that will be able to jump in

and fill those positions very well," Henson said. "We lost Abby Conery, she was our catcher, Vada Krueger, who was our second-baseman and Aspen Jarett stepped in as our first-baseman last year."

The team is now in their 12th year, and over that time the local feeder program has done an excellent job of sending capable ballplayers to the prep level, Henson said, with the fundamentals of the sport mixed into the batter. That dynamic allows Heart River to hit the field immediately and start fine tuning positions and the pitching rotation to prepare for what is typically a brief calendar, depending on the weather.

Beyond the aforementioned upperclassmen, Jovi Henson, Olivia Ewoniuk, Raylee Morast and Kaitlyn Binstock represent the Class of 2029 and are joined by freshmen Annie Silbernagel, Chloe Olheiser, Lauren Pryzmus, Tiayna Lecoe and Karlee Tescher, with eight middle-school students who will benefit from an abundance of junior varsity experience during the coming months.

"We've got a lot of junior-high kids, and that's great, and we have our varsity game first and then we do a JV game after, and what I want is for them is to get minutes so that they're able to have the game experience," Henson

said. "That's definitely been the case with the younger girls, and we want to retain that."

But the coaching staff, with Henson's assistant coach Lynette Silbernagel a mainstay of the program, is anticipating a collective growth in all the athletes. Giving young women an opportunity to compete on the high-school level also is important to their advancement, which is another crucial part of the Heart River focus.

"The life-lessons from being a student-athlete teaches them, and we have an outstanding group of girls who are great; and the upperclassmen leadership this year is great and I'm excited about it," Henson said. "Competition is a good thing, and it forces the girls to push themselves outside their comfort zone, and I think that's a good thing."

The 2026 calendar gets off to a rocket start with a Thursday, April 2 date with Harvey -Wells County in the Cougars' home- and season-opener followed by a trip to New England to face the Tigers' newly constituted team that joins Heart River and 10 others in Class B, Region 4. Another pair of home games against Nedrose and Velva on April 10 and 14, respectively, come on the heels of the New England game and that will be followed by a two-game road trip on April 16 and 20 at South

Prairie and Hazen.

Four more games round out the busy April schedule on April 21 versus Wilton-Wing at home and at Washburn on the 24th, while April 28 will see the Cougars back at home against Central McLean on April 28 and the annual date-with-destiny away to perennial-favorites Beulah, which closes out the month on April 30.

Gretchen Silbernagel and Jovi Henson will serve primary duties in the pitching circle, while Roberts, Wyman, Binstock and Annie Silbernagel will be relied upon to fill their historical spots in the field, given their experience levels.

The popularity of fast-pitch softball has grown such that the upstart New England Tigers join the fray, and Henson added it's a development that was a long-time coming. It ensures, also, that one more regional matchup is on the schedule in what is a frequent-driver-miles arrangement in Region 4 with all the requisite traveling.

"It's a close bus trip, that's why I'm excited, because before now our closest bus trips were Hazen and Beulah and that's still an hour and a half," Henson said with a laugh. "But I've known (Tigers head coach) Abby Kessel for years, and I just love her and I'm so excited she will be able to bring that to New England."

For more information about Belfield Public School and South Heart Public School, and all their activities, please keep reading the Billings County Pioneer and/or visit their websites at www.belfield.k12.nd.us or www.south-heart.k12.nd.us.

SENIOR SPOTLIGHT



Belfield High School

Name: *Elise Rae Ceceilia Fugere*

Family: *My sister Ruby, my dad Rob, my Grandma Della*

Do you have any nicknames? *Ellie*

What is your favorite class? *Choir, welding*

Favorite midnight snack? *Sweet tea*

What is your favorite TV show? *Metalocalypse*

Who is your favorite musician? *Ozzy Osbourne*

Favorite food? *Paprikash*

Least favorite school lunch? *Spaghetti*

How do you stay informed on current events? *My 6th sense*

Least favorite chore to help with at home? *Dishes*

What is your favorite holiday? Why? *4th of July, fireworks*

What are your plans after high school? *Work at Trappers Kettle, then go to college*

What do you do in your spare time? *Play guitar, listen to music, work*

Do you have any pet peeves? *When people ignore me when I'm talking*

Who is your role model and why? *My grandma Dell, she is the most level-headed person I know*

If you could choose a super power, what would it be and why? *Teleportation, I can't drive*

If you could meet one person from history, who would it be? *Jimi Hendrix*

What would you do if you won the lottery? *By a '69 Mustang, "The Boss", wrap it in red*

What is your dream job? *Singer*

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Billings County Commission will hold a Public Hearing during the special meeting on Monday, March 30, 2026. The special meeting will begin at 1:00 PM and the Public Hearing will take place following the special meeting agenda items. The hearing will take place in the Commissioner's Room at the county courthouse, Medora, ND. The purpose of the hearing is to consider the approval or denial of the following amendments to the Billings County Zoning Resolution No. 1:

Floodplain Management Ordinance

The Billings County Planning & Zoning Commission reviewed the final draft and recommended approval of the Floodplain Management Ordinance for Billings County on Thursday, February 19, 2026. The Ordinance was amended to meet the requirements for floodplain management in North Dakota based on changes to state law adopted in SB 2027 during the 2025 legislative session. The amendments are based on the Model A Ordinance for communities NOT currently mapped by FEMA provided by the ND DWR. See ND Department of Water Resources website for details: https://www.dwr.nd.gov/reg_approp/floodplain_management/nfip_fm_senate_bill_2027.html

Other Amendments

- 2.3 Definitions:
 - a) Primitive Campground (NEW)
 - b) Glamping Campground (NEW)
 - c) Recreational Vehicle (RV) Park (UPDATE)
 - (89) Recreational Vehicle Park -- (UPDATE)
- 5.3 Recreational District
 - 5.3.2 Conditionally Permitted Uses
 - 5.3.2(a) Recreational vehicle parks, and campgrounds (UPDATE)

The proposed amendments were recommended for approval by the Planning & Zoning Commission hearing held on Thursday, February 19, 2026.

Copies of the proposed amendments are available for review on the Billings County website at www.billingscountynnd.gov or during regular office hours at the Billings County Courthouse.

Dated at Medora this 6th day of March, 2026.
Stacey Swanson
Zoning Director

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