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Kopischke returns to the pitching circle for Kennedy

By Jason Olson Apr 11, 2017



Freshman pitcher Courtney Kopischke is back in the circle for the Eagles. (Sun Current photo by Jason Olson)

New head coach builds for the future

Look for Kennedy fastpitch softball to have a bit of a new look under the guidance of newly promoted head coach, Jim Leicht.

Leicht has been part of the Eagles program for the last five seasons, serving as junior varsity coach under Ashley Saaranen last season.

Captains this season include senior catcher Sydney Marr and senior infielder Sarah Schultz for what will be a transition year for the Eagles with a faster and smaller lineup.

Last year's standout-catcher Morgan Garbrecht is now a freshman at Winona State but Leicht said she will rejoin the Eagles dugout as an assistant coach in time for sections.

"Morgan figured out she really has a passion for coaching and she'll be

here with us by May," Leicht said about Garbrecht who is already gaining experience coaching at clinics.

"This will be a different team but we've got a really good group of younger kids coming up," Leicht said with two seniors and three freshmen on the varsity roster.

Courtney Kopischke was the top pitcher for the Eagles last season as an eighth grader and comes into the season ready to go after excelling with her club team, Minnesota Vortex during the prep off-season.

Courtney's younger sister, Brynna Kopischke is another of the young players Leicht anticipates to make an impact with the varsity team at some point.

"Courtney has four pitches, is throwing 57-58 miles-per-hour and is just a really good player who takes it seriously playing year-round for Vortex," Leicht said as Courtney is part of Vortex 16s and Brynna on the 14s.

Courtney is joined by classmates Jillian Ziebol and Isabella Fierro.

Juniors Cassie Kopischke, Gabriela Kirou and Ayania Leicht return as infield starters with Cassie at first base and Leicht at shortstop.

Sophomore Sammie Ohm is also back in the outfield and will be joined by freshman Jillian Ziebol and Bella Fierro in the outfield.

Junior catcher Lily Williams will see time behind the plate with Marr and sophomores Tiffany Larsen and Alana Miller are also part of the varsity roster.

Kennedy scrimmaged Duluth Denfeld, Mahtomedi and New Ulm that served as a way for a mix of varsity, junior varsity and younger players to gain game-speed experience ahead of the season.

With so many younger players, Leicht said one goal for the season is to make sure players are being coached and taught the same way, regardless of the level of team, varsity, JV, sophomore or freshman team.

“We have a really good group of younger kids coming up so I want to make sure we’re teaching everything the same from the top down,” he said, placing emphasis on progress made at the lower levels instead of only looking at wins and losses. “It’s about developing players to move up to the next level.”

In that same philosophy, the varsity team looks to build on and improve from each game toward sections where they will once again play in Section 3AAA against South St. Paul and Holy Angels among others before moving to a new section in 2018.

Kennedy opened the season against Orono at Kelly Fields on April 7 before opening the Metro West Conference season at St. Louis Park April 11. The Eagles began a three-game home stand against state champion Chanhassen April 13, Minneapolis Southwest April 17 and Chaska April 18.

Kennedy will play in the Richfield Spartans tournament April 22 with games at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. against Duluth East, St. Paul Highland Park, Mahtomedi, Minneapolis South, Simley and Minneapolis Southwest.

Contact Jason Olson at jason.olson@ecm-inc.com. Follow him on Twitter @SunSportsJason