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## Eagles softball still young but experience is there

by Jason Olson [jason.olson@ecm-inc.com](mailto:jason.olson@ecm-inc.com) Apr 19, 2018

***Kopischke, a sophomore, is back in the pitching circle after tossing nearly 200 strikeouts in 2017***

A pair of Section 3AAA wins last spring helped Kennedy fast pitch reach 11 wins with a line up filled with underclassmen including pitcher Courtney Kopischke who is only a sophomore after striking out 196 batters in 140 innings of work.

She brings a 1.30 ERA into this season giving up a total of 26 earned runs on 135 hits and 34 walks.



Kennedy captains this season from left are: Cassie Kopischke, Sam Ohm and Ayania Leicht.

(Sun Current staff photo by Jason Olson)

Leicht and his staff used a lot of eighth and ninth graders in the program last season and with their return to the field in 2018, the junior varsity, varsity and younger levels will have at least 13-14 rostered players on each team.

“With the snow and whatever, we’re going to need depth all over and pitching depth will be what hurts but we have Courtney back,” Leicht said as she was among the top strikeout pitchers in the state as a ninth grader. “She looks phenomenal. She’s taken the next step and right now she’s in the top two-three pitchers in our section.”

Two seniors graduated from the team in 2017 including catcher Sydney Marr who is a freshman at Century College but returned to Kennedy preseason practices to assist the coaches with a team that has experience but will once again be young.

Two varsity senior infielders in Ayania Leicht and Cassie Kopischke are captains along with junior outfielder Samantha Ohm.

Coach Jim Leicht waits until the first couple weeks of the season to determine starting positions to see where the best fit is for those who made the varsity team.

With that being said, seven starters are back with the exception of catcher where Sydney Marr graduated in 2017 and is now at Century College. She returned to help the coaching staff this spring work with two underclassmen vying for varsity time including freshman Amber Converse who saw minimal innings in 2017 along with eighth grader Chasity Anderson who is a standout goalie in hockey and one tough kid.

“Chasity is just a phenomenal athlete and I always say about a catcher you never know until they take the first ball off their shoulder or anywhere else,” Leicht said. “We’re doing tryouts and Brynna, who is my JV pitcher, throws a ball, skips it off the wood and hits her in the inner part of the thigh. Anybody else you would’ve went (ouch) but she leaned over, picked up the ball, threw it back, squats down and says ‘I’m ready.’ ‘Okay, I know you’re a catcher now.’ You know you are a hockey goalie at that point. You can’t show anything, you can’t whatever and she’s extremely athletic but pretty raw. She’s got a great arm and everything else. She’s played fast pitch but not sure how well she knows the varsity game so when she plays we’re going to have a system in place to help her.”

Handling the pitching staff and in-game situations will be the steepest learning curve for both catchers.

“Pitching and defense will be pretty strong with our returners and Courtney pitching,” Leicht said. “We’re going to need to score more runs so this year we’ve talked a lot more about contact. Everyone’s been going through the same thing so for the first three-four games, whomever puts the ball in play more will win the game because there will be errors all over the field because nobody’s been outside to practice so we’ve talked a lot about just making contact, don’t over swing, over-think everything. Put the ball in play for the first three games and we’ve worked on contact in the batting cages and less on power.

“We also need to be more aggressive on the bases,” Leicht said. “We did great on pitching and defense last year, we lost to Chanhassen and Jefferson 2-0 and 1-0 but we didn’t score. You’re never going to win a game until you score a run and we can talk about how great those games are but until we put runs on the board we can’t expect to win anything.”

This year the focus offensively is to pressure the other team to make the errors in the field and take advantage of those opportunities.

“Bunting and moving runs over,” he said. “We try to take a step every year and this year we introduced an off-season weight training program of which we had 19 girls participate and we also did Dome ball which we had 15 sign up for that.

“So we’re trying to introduce a little bit each year to do what it takes to get to that next level as a program and so far we’ve had buy-in all the way through,” Leicht said.

The Eagles are still working on the first game of the season as the winter continues to hold area softball fields at bay. Kennedy was scheduled to host Richfield at Kelly Playfields on Tuesday, April 24 and face Jefferson at Dred Scott on Thursday, April 26.

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