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Kopischke's back on the rubber for Kennedy softball

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Young Eagles have experience to go with talent in 2019

Only two starters graduated from Kennedy's 2018 softball team that finished fourth in Section 6-4A and posted a 7-8 record in the competitive Metro West Conference.

"We still have a young team so the future looks great," Eagles coach Jim Leicht said with a dose of strong pitching combined with more run production. "Strong pitching should hold our opponents to low scores but we need to increase our offensive scoring and continue to cut down on fielding errors."

The Eagles opened the season against Jefferson at Dred Scott on Tuesday before Thursday's home opener against St. Louis Park. First pitch at Kelly Fields is 4:30 p.m. followed by Friday's game at Wayzata with section seeding implications at 4:15 p.m.

Kennedy is poised to make a push to climb the standings with junior standout Courtney Kopischke back in the pitcher's circle along with nine familiar faces back for the Eagles to go along with five newcomers to make for a busy dugout.

One of the state's top hurlers will be joined once again by freshman sister Brinna Kopischke who led the team with five doubles and is the backup pitcher for the Eagles after posting 19 strikeouts in 32 innings in 2019.



Coming into her third season as the top pitcher for Kennedy, junior Courtney Kopischke is poised to continue to frustrate the opposition not only by throwing but also by swinging the bat.

(Photo by Mark Trockman-trockstock.com)

Courtney Kopischke was Kennedy's Most Valuable Player in 2017 and 2018, earning All-Metro West and All-Section honors both seasons and heads into 2019 as a captain.

Last season she struck out 177 batters over 100 1/3 innings with a 1.53 earned runs average and a .967 WHIP (walks+hits/innings pitched) and should reach the 500 strikeout milestone early this spring.

This is her third season as Kennedy's main pitcher and splits time with Midwest Speed and Minnesota A's during the club-ball season.

As a sophomore she was fourth in the state for strikeouts per inning pitched, sixth for total strikeouts, 11th for lowest ERA and seventh for WHIP.

"We expect more of the same for two more years," coach Jim Leicht said as Courtney Kopischke also produced with the bat with a .353 batting average, .431 on-base percentage and .431 slugging percentage.

As for Brinna, Leicht said, "Although shadowed by her older sibling, Brinna's poised to start taking more of the load this year as her speed has increased and she works hard in the offseason."

In addition to the Kopischke's, Kennedy will run out an experienced lineup each day, including Alana Miller who returns to the dugout for her senior season after missing 2018 with an injury. Miller is a co-captain who is committed to play softball at Bethel University in 2020.

The infielder was named an all-conference honorable mention recipient in 2017 and the Eagle Award in 2018 after displaying her passion for the game, despite the injury. "She showed her love for the game and team by attending all practices and games to support her teammates and continue to learn," Leicht said about Miller, a cornerstone of the program. "She has worked hard in the off-season playing club ball with the Breakers and now the Minnesota A's. The hard work has paid off as she is committed to playing for Bethel next year."

Senior co-captain Megan Fobbe is a versatile fielder who can play a variety of spots in the infield or outfield while posting the third highest batting average (.314) among returning players to go with a .385 on-base percentage and .314 slugging percentage. "She has the passion for the team and works for a strong bond between them," Leicht said.

Senior captain Sammy Ohm brings the experience gained as a captain as a junior to go along with an All-Section selection as a sophomore in 2017. Ohm uses her speed to roam centerfield and move around the bases. She hit for a .266 average in 2018 to go along with a .288 on-base percentage and .344 slugging percentage.

Senior first baseman Merideth Hanson shared first base duties as a junior and was error-free in that role. She plays during the club season with the TC Breakers where she continues to develop a powerful swing, according to Leicht.

Junior Bella Fiero comes into her third season with the varsity program after leading the team in stolen bases where she also earned an all-conference honorable mention award. She plays club softball for the Bloomington-based Clutch Hitters, "and works hard to better her game," Leicht said.

Junior Cordy Ruch is a second-year varsity player who can play in the infield or outfield.

Freshman Ellie Baker hit .317 last season while slugging .390 and reached base at a .349 clip and also plays for the Minnesota Sting. "She works very hard and can play anywhere you need her to," Leicht said. "Always has a smile and great attitude. One of the top hitters on the team last year with more to come."

Freshman Carissa Wheeler was another underclassman relied upon to start for the varsity team in 2018, primarily at third base. "She had a really strong arm at third," Leicht said as she plays club softball for Minnesota Vortex and now Minnesota Force. Wheeler hit .261 with a .320 on-base percentage and .261 slugging percentage.

Leicht anticipates five newcomers to contribute to varsity this season including one sophomore, two freshmen and two eighth graders.

Sophomore Gabby Brown played valuable varsity innings behind the dish last spring due to several injuries. She will also see time at first base.

Freshmen Taylor David and Ava Moribito gained valuable experience with their club programs, Clutch Hitters and Starters, respectively. David can play in the infield or outfield, Leicht said: "Very coachable, works hard, always smiling and will do whatever is needed for the team. She's a varsity-level player and will contribute greatly to the program."

Moribito split time between the freshman and junior varsity programs, eventually securing a key role as JV catcher due to injuries. "She handled the pressure very well and is one of our varsity catcher this year," Leicht said as Moribito will also see time at third base.

Ava Bruins and Olivia Spencer are two eighth graders ready to break into the varsity lineup. Bruins is another capable catcher who also plays at shortstop but had her 2018 season cut short due to an injury. She played mainly at JV but had some varsity innings. "She's very game-smart and shows a lot of potential," Leicht said of Bruins whom also plays for Midwest Speed.

Spencer also plays for Clutch Hitters. She primarily played freshman and JV last season with a few varsity at-bats. Leicht noted she shows a lot of power and works hard.

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