

Wealth of experience makes Marion a Wamac contender

Written by Jake Koolbeck

Sunday, 20 May 2012 17:43 - Last Updated Sunday, 20 May 2012 20:07

Marion finished 17-20 last season in a tough Wamac conference. The Indians lost just one player from that team. The experienced core of players, plus some help from a group of talented youngsters, should propel Marion to a better year. Don't be surprised if the Indians are strong competitors in the Wamac.

"With all our experience coming back we are setting goals to be towards the top of our conference," Coach Kim Knapp said.

Marion's senior and junior class have been playing together for a while. Many were pressed into service as 8th graders, so they are experienced.

There are no excuses for this group this year and they don't plan on making any.

"We can't use the excuse that we are young anymore," Knapp said. "It's time for them to make people stand up and take notice."

With another year under their belt this group of Indians looks poised to make a jump from afterthought to contender. It should be a fun year for Indian fans.

Key Losses:

Marion's lone loss is a big one. Leah Smith (.360, 36 hits, 31 runs) was not only a strong player, she was a great leader last year for the Indians.

"Leah was a great leader on the field for us," Knapp said. "It is difficult to lose someone like her."

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Key Returning Players:

Smith's leadership will be missed but Marion has three outstanding senior leaders this year to replace her. Mikaela Gormaat, Allison Scott, and Bailey Bacon should fill the leadership role nicely for the Indians.

"We have three outstanding senior leaders that will step in and fill that role for us," Knapp said. "All three of them are great leaders, both on and off the field."

If you look at all the players that return Scott (.360, 36 hits, 30 runs), and freshmen Abby Phillips (.400) and Michalyn Mohr (.340, 35 hits, 25 runs, 21 RBIs). That trio should be instrumental in improving the Indians' offensive attack.

"Offensively, we have strong hitters, but we need to do the little things, like getting our bunts down and improve our base running in order to reach our goals," Knapp said.

Goemaat (12-13, 2.69 ERA) and Haley Vanourney (4-6, 4.87) should lead an improved pitching staff that will add talented 8th grader Amber Fiser.

"(Fiser) will be a great asset to our pitching staff," Knapp said. "Between Mikaela Gormaat, Haley Vanourney, and Amber we should be able to mix things up and hopefully create some havoc."

Outlook:

Despite a sub-.500 season last year, the Indians look like a team that could push the top teams in the Wamac this season. Not only do they return a huge number of talented players, but they also lost seven one-run games last year.

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"We were 17-20 last year, but several of the games we lost were by one or two runs or we lost in extra innings," Knapp said.

If the hitting progresses like it should and the pitchers can find a way to lower last year's 3.68 team ERA, this team looks like one that could win some ball games this summer. If the Indians close out their close games this year their season should be a successful one.

"We definitely will need to lower our pitchers' ERA's if we are going to be successful, plus we need to clean things up in the field," Knapp said. "We just didn't have the mentality to finish. Hopefully, we can rectify that, this year."

I like the Indians' squad this year with the blend of experience and skilled youth, but the Wamac is loaded with teams with lots of talent returning. I think the Indians win more regularly this year but I don't see a Wamac title or state trip in their future when they play 4A this postseason.