

Saints want a return trip to state

Written by

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Editor's note: This is the seventh and last in a series of preseason articles about Metro softball teams)

The Xavier softball team is coming off of an appearance in the state tournament last season and is aiming to make it back to Fort Dodge again this season.

First, the Saints will have to replace a talented senior class that lead the team to a 34-9 record.

"I think we can surprise a lot of people," said senior third baseman Abby Bedard. "We are younger but we have been working really hard in practice and bonding a little bit more than we thought we would."

Last year's seniors featured two second team all-state performers in catcher McKenna Miller and pitcher/outfielder Jenny Drahozal, who now is playing softball at Iowa State. Miller plays for Kirkwood.

"We are all just going to have to work really hard," said senior Kristen Winter, who will play softball at Kirkwood next year. "We lost a lot of people, so we are going to need to have some younger kids step up."

One of the young kids that will be stepping up this year is eighth grader Erin Drahozal, Jenny's cousin. Erin will fill in the pitching vacancy left by her older cousin and already is earning the admiration of her teammates.

"It is tough for an eighth grader, at any position," Coach Brian Erbe said. "So far she has done a very good job, she seems mature and has played an awful lot of softball."

Erin will be the No. 2 pitcher for the Saints behind sophomore Jacey Wiebold who went 16-4

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last season with a team-low 1.57 ERA.

“(Wiebold) will pitch all our big games and she will start off in all of our conference doubleheaders and pitch the first game,” Erbe said. “She has worked extremely hard over the winter and has developed a couple different pitches. She seems to have a little bit better command of her pitches so far this year, and she has picked up a little speed. We expect her to be the catalyst for us.”

Xavier had a powerful club last year, belting 36 home runs and 98 doubles. Miller hit 13 home runs. Erbe said he's not sure the Saints will be able to match those numbers.

“Last year we won a lot of games when we scored six or seven runs,” Erbe said. “I certainly hope that we do that this year, but it is not necessarily an expectation. I just think we are going to have to focus a little bit more and make sure that we are making all the defensive plays. We can't afford to have two or three errors in a game.”

The Xavier offense and defense will be led by their three senior infielders, all four-year starters. Shortstop Tyler Sampson led the Saints in hitting with a .446 average and also hit seven home runs. Bedard, at third base, hit .432 with four homers and Winter, at second base, hit .395 with four homers and a team-high 29 RBIs.

Those three are excited to see what they can make of their senior year.

“Our relationship definitely goes beyond the softball field,” Winter said. “We've been best friends since we were little. We have played together forever, so it is a lot of fun being out there together.”