

Halvorson joining Yegge at DePaul

Written by Jim Ecker
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Natalie Halvorson played softball for Joe Yegge at Cedar Rapids Prairie and then joined him at Kirkwood a year ago.

Now she'll be following her coach to DePaul University in Chicago.

Halvorson has decided to leave Kirkwood after one season and head to DePaul, where Yegge has been named the new associate head coach of the Blue Demons in the Big East Conference.

"Life never really goes how you plan, right?" Halvorson mused on her social media account.

Halvorson compiled a 26-9 record and 2.51 earned run average this past season as a freshman at Kirkwood and was named a junior college All-American. She struck out 162 batters in 184 1/3 innings, with only 25 walks. Her 26 victories tied for the third-most in the country.

Halvorson was looking forward to pitching for the Eagles again next season, but that changed last week when Yegge accepted an offer from new DePaul Coach Tracie Adix-Zins as her top assistant.

Yegge knew Adix-Zins from her years as an assistant coach at the University of Wisconsin. At one point earlier in their careers, Yegge had invited Adix-Zins to be one of his assistants at Kirkwood. Now the roles were reversed and she invited Yegge to join her in Chicago.

"It happened quick," he said.

Yegge did not know he was going to be the associate head coach until he met with DePaul's

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athletic director. Until then, he figured he was going to be a regular member of the staff.

"Tracie kind of forgot to mention that," he said, laughing.

Yegge told the players at Kirkwood last Thursday morning that he'd be leaving. Shortly after, he extended the invitation to Halvorson to come along too.

Halvorson's goal was to pitch at a Division I school, but the chance arrived a year earlier than expected. She was happy to accept.

"I was given the opportunity to continue playing softball and to study at DePaul University in Chicago this fall!," she wrote on her Twitter account. "A huge thank-you to Kirkwood and to everyone else who has given me endless support.

"Lots of love to y'all."

DePaul needed more pitchers for next season and Yegge knew exactly who to invite.

"I think Natalie is going to do a great job," he said. "She's going to get a great opportunity. She's going to get to pitch a lot of innings the next few years."

Halvorson will be working with a pitching coach at DePaul. Yegge will be handling other duties for Adix-Zins, an All-American pitcher at DePaul who has never been a head coach before.

"I'm going to run the offense, coaching third base and kind of being her right-hand man," he said.

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Yegge, 41, acknowledged that he'd like to become a Division I head coach himself one day at a major conference. He said working at DePaul could steer him in that direction.

"This is an opportunity for me," he said. "This could set me up with something for my own team."

Yegge said he recruited 12 new players for Kirkwood for the 2019 season. He expects all of them to join the Eagles, but said one of the new recruits has not made a final decision.

"I think we have a great team coming in," he said.

Yegge won 537 games at Kirkwood and made six trips to the junior college World Series with the Eagles.

"I had a great job at Kirkwood," he said. "Great people to work with. I loved it. This has been a gut-wrenching decision. It's a hard place to leave."