

Yegge's Prairie Hawks sweep Saints

Written by Jim Ecker

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Cedar Rapids Prairie softball coach Joe Yegge saw a lot of familiar faces in the Xavier dugout Wednesday night during their doubleheader at Xavier.

Yegge is also the highly successful coach at Kirkwood Community College, and he sees former players and former assistants at a variety of stops during the high school season.

Xavier head coach Nikki Gahring used to work for Yegge at Kirkwood, Xavier assistant coach Kristen Winter played for Yegge at Kirkwood and is now one of his assistants during the college softball season, and new Xavier assistant coach Maddie Hansen was an All-American catcher for the Eagles this past season when they finished fifth in the country.

"Nikki was my right-hand man for three years, Kristen was basically my right-hand man this year going into the national tournament and Maddie had a great year for us," Yegge said. "It is kind of neat.

"It's pretty cool to see that those guys are out there doing it. It must say we're doing something right and they love it."

Yegge got the upper hand on his friends at Xavier Wednesday as the Hawks swept the Saints, 12-0 in four innings and 5-3 in the Mississippi Valley Conference twinbill.

Kirkwood played 64 games this season and finished with a flashy 58-6 record and now Yegge will be coaching another 40-plus games this summer. He'll finish the year with more than 100 games under his belt, not to mention Kirkwood's contests in the fall that don't count on his record.

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Yegge used to coach some of Prairie's players during the off-season and was tempted to become the head coach when the job became available following the 2012 campaign.

"I saw that it was a sleeping giant," he said. "I live in the Prairie district, my kids go to Prairie schools, we're Prairie people now. I wanted to see if I can help change the culture, and I think we're doing it a little bit.

"It's not getting the pay or wanting to be around the game even more. I really just wanted to change the culture, because a lot of these people (in the Prairie community) are friends."

Yegge has compiled a 94-52 record in four years at Prairie, including a 13-10 overall mark this season and 9-5 record in the conference.

Natalie Halvorson pitched a three-hit shutout in the first game for the Hawks, who scored their 12 runs on eight walks, seven hits and two hit batters. Xavier pitchers were especially generous in the third inning when they walked six batters, including four with the bases loaded to force in runs.

Lauren Kuch belted a grand slam for Prairie in the opener. Payton Akers and Neila Bell had two hits. Katie Langholz had two hits for Xavier.

Prairie jumped to a 4-0 lead in the second inning of the nightcap, but Xavier pecked away and pulled within 4-3 in the bottom of the fifth. Halvorson returned to the circle in the bottom of the fifth and tossed an additional 2 1/3 innings of shutout ball to quell the comeback.

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Kuch and Akers had two hits for Prairie in the second game. Keera Ball and Langholz had two hits for the Saints.

Xavier fell to 7-14 overall and 5-9 in the conference.