

Hansen, Carter join Kirkwood softball

Written by Jim Ecker

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Joe Yegge thinks serving as the head softball coach at Cedar Rapids Prairie is helping his recruiting efforts at Kirkwood Community College.

Two prime examples this year are Maddie Hansen of Jefferson and Gabi Carter of Prairie, who have finished their all-state careers in high school and have joined Yegge's powerful club at Kirkwood.

Yegge has welcomed other good Metro players to Kirkwood before, but he thinks his three years at Prairie have boosted his efforts in getting more star players to join the Eagles.

Yegge has enjoyed three good seasons at Prairie, including a trip to the state tournament and just the second Mississippi Valley Conference title in school history after the program had languished for years.

He thinks players and their families have noticed that success. "They realize if we can do that at Prairie, maybe this (Kirkwood) is a good place to go," he said Friday.

Yegge also thinks there's an advantage in scouting players from the Prairie dugout, rather from in the stands.

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"If you're in the dugout against them and you're calling pitches against them, it's easier to get a feel for them on the field than when you're sitting in the bleachers," he said.

Yegge had Carter on his own team at Prairie the past three years and admired the work of the slugging third baseman. "She's going to produce a lot of power for us," he said. "She doesn't strike out. She's a tough out."

Yegge's teams competed against Hansen and the Jefferson J-Hawks the past three years in the MVC and he also gave Hansen hitting lessons during the off-season.

"She is probably the best catcher in the state of Iowa. We're fortunate to get her," he said.

"She's got a strong arm, she's got a quick release, she can hit, she can hit for average, she can hit for power. She's just an all-around good ballplayer."

Kirkwood already has an outstanding catcher with sophomore Jasmine Ragusi. He said Hansen can also play third base and first base for Kirkwood as well as share the catching duties.

Yegge has signed 14 freshmen for this year's team with nine players from Iowa, four from Illinois and one from Wisconsin. "I'm excited about every one of them," he remarked. "I think they're hidden gems."

The other Iowans are Emilee Meyer of Muscatine, Mackenzie Helgersen of Bettendorf, Taylor Nearad of Solon, Lexi Kinnaird of Tiffin, Payton Mercer of Carlisle, Morgan Frost of Gilbertville and Miranda Kaste of Muscatine.

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The four players from Illinois are Kellie Smet from Moline, Rachel Winston of Sherrard, Teagan Toft of Belvidere and Lexi Ferrari of Rock Island. Jane Oligney is from Iona, Wis.

Yegge had good things to say about all the players. He noted that Nearad was a four-time all-state selection at Solon and a Player of the Year.

Yegge thinks he's added more power and speed to the ballclub, along with two good pitchers in Winston and Kinnaird. The 14 freshmen will join seven returning sophomores.

"This is probably our best squad, on paper, that I've had in eight years," he said.

Yegge has compiled a 375-87 record at Kirkwood with six conference titles and three trips to the national tournament.

The Eagles will begin practicing later this month and have a fall schedule that includes Iowa State, Western Illinois, Drake, Iowa, Upper Iowa, Northern Iowa, Indian Hills, Bradley and Northwestern.