

No.5 Kirkwood softball team ready to go

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 13 February 2014 20:43 -

The Kirkwood softball team won 50 straight games last season and reached the semifinals of the national tournament, but graduation and two early departures have left the Eagles with a vastly different club this year.

The expectations remain as high as ever, however, as the fifth-ranked Eagles get ready to open the 2014 season at the St. Ambrose indoor tournament Saturday.

"I think we're biting at the bit to go," said Coach Joe Yegge.

Yegge knew he'd lose a good chunk of his lineup to graduation, but All-American pitcher Amber Logemann and all-star shortstop Leah Duffe both left Kirkwood after their freshman campaigns to play at a four-year school.

Logemann's departure for Miami of Ohio was expected after she led the nation in strikeouts and earned run average, but Duffe left in December and enrolled at Southeast Missouri State.

"If we had Amber and Leah in our lineup, I wouldn't be afraid to say we could contend for the national title," said Yegge.

Nonetheless, Yegge anticipates having another strong club after finishing 57-5 last season and placing fifth at the national tournament.

"This is a whole new team, a lot of new faces," he said. "We're trying to build off it, more than anything."

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Yegge has two experienced pitchers with Sam Belz (20-1, 0.96 ERA) and Shy Saladino (12-0). "They'll be our go-to pitchers and our leadership in the circle," he said.

Kirkwood also has an all-star catcher with Krysta Tutsch, who hit .338 with 15 homers and 62 RBIs last season with a powerful left-handed swing. "She's a freak and strong as an ox," said Yegge.

Belz has already signed with the University of Northern Iowa for next year. Saladino and Tutsch have committed to Southwest Minnesota State.

Outfielder Kayla Tatge, who led the nation with 25 homers last season and drove in 72 runs, is now playing at St. Ambrose. And third baseman Kaylee Krack, who hit 19 homers with 71 RBIs, is playing at Southeast Missouri State.

The Eagles also lost second baseman Kristen Winter, first baseman Kelsie Campbell and center fielder Shelby Crist to graduation. Yegge feels like he brought in a strong recruiting class this year and has capable replacements.

"We're really young," he said. "We're going to have seven freshmen on the field at all times."

Kirkwood has led the nation in home runs the last three years and belted 104 last season. Yegge does not know if they can do that again, but he likes the way his club has looked against live pitching in practice.

"I think we'll be able to score runs," he said.

Kirkwood will face Illinois Central and Waubensee at the St. Ambrose tournament Saturday and will meet Waubensee and St. Ambrose University on Sunday.

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Xavier grad Jenna Schulte is scheduled to start at first base Saturday.

KIRKWOOD ROSTER

Sophomores

Alana Boehm, OF, Portage La Prairie, Canada
Taylor Wise, 1B, Geneseo, Ill.
Shyanne Saladino, P, Davenport
Krysta Tutsch, C, Davenport
Sam Belz, P, Davenport

Freshmen

Alex Finn, OF, Davenport
Alicia Crivaro, UT, Des Moines
Chasney Jenkins, OF, East Moline, Ill.
Tara Walls, IF, Oxford
Brianna Farley, 1B, Denver (Iowa)
Madison Keysor, P, Treynor
Erin Weno, IF, Iowa City
Brittney Lash, OF, Cedar Rapids
Keirstyn Davis, UT, Clinton
Natalie Clark, UT, Des Moines
Brooke Prior, UT, Silvis, Ill.
Jenna Schulte, 1B, Cedar Rapids
Lexi Quandt, C, Davenport