

## Kennedy makes 'pitch' for Metro title

Written by Jim Ecker  
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The Kennedy Cougars boasted one of the top pitching staffs in the state last year when they finished 31-7 and reached the Class 4A state tournament.

Here's bad news for their opponents: They're all back this year after posting a staff ERA of 1.66, the best in Class 4A.

All that strong pitching makes Kennedy the favorite to win the annual Bob Vrbicek Metro Baseball Tournament that begins Monday.

The opening-round games at Kennedy feature Marion against Linn-Mar at 10 a.m. and Kennedy against Xavier at noon. The first-round games at Washington feature Jefferson against Mount Vernon at 10 a.m. and Washington against Prairie at noon.

All eight teams will play twice on Monday, with first-round losers meeting at 2 p.m. and first-round winners battling at 4 p.m. at both sites.

The final round will be played Tuesday at Kennedy and Washington. There are no games at Veterans Memorial Stadium this year because the Kernels are home Tuesday.

Zach Daniels fashioned an 8-1 record and 1.01 ERA for the Cougars last season. Blake Hargens was 8-1 with a 1.10 ERA and Sammy Lizarraga was 7-1 with a 1.31 ERA as the three men at the top of the rotation compiled a 23-3 mark.

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Sawyer Newhaus (4-2, 3.5) and Jacob Henry (3-1, 1.06) also return with fine credentials.

Daniels, who has committed to the Iowa Hawkeyes, hit .467 with 32 RBIs as a middle infielder. Tyler Dralle hit .367 with 24 RBIs, Kyle Brewer hit .333 and Lizarraga, also a premier catcher, batted .300 with 34 RBIs.

The Jefferson J-Hawks finished 24-15 last season and feature Spencer VanScoyoc, an Arizona State recruit who hit .400 with six homers and 38 RBIs last season. He's also a top pitcher, but had injury problems on the mound last year.

The J-Hawks acquired a strong defensive catcher when Caleg Stekl transferred from Marion High School. Shortstop Lucas Larson hit .321 with four homers and 31 RBIs. Jared Eivins was a .300 hitter and went 3-1 with a 2.02 ERA. Colton Knox (4-0, 3.41) and Connor VanScoyoc (3-3, 4.53) are also back for Jefferson.

The Linn-Mar Lions hope to get a big year out of Brandt Ollinger, who hit .452 with four homers and 36 RBIs as a sophomore in 2013. He appeared in only seven games for the Lions last season due to travel ball, but is back on the roster this year.

Todd Rima, the head coach at Kirkwood Community College, will make his debut as Prairie's new coach in the Metro Tournament.

The Marion Indians finished 24-16 last season. The Xavier Saints went 22-18. Linn-Mar was 16-21, Prairie 14-22 and Washington 12-19.