

## **Quality and quantity of talent leads J-Hawks**

Written by Jake Koolbeck

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Jefferson comes into 2012 with talent to spare. To put it frankly, there is so much talent and experience on this J-Hawk team that a state berth should be expected.

The J-Hawks went to state nine straight years before coming up short the last two and that weighs heavy on the minds of a terrific senior class.

With the amount of talent and experience back this year, Jefferson should end the year in Fort Dodge. It is not unrealistic that this team could compete for the first Class 5A state title.

“The key to getting back to the state tournament is improvement,” Coach Larry Niemeyer said. “We need to be able to hit good pitching better than we have in the past.”

It may seem like I am putting high expectations on this team, but when you combine the bats, pitching, and experience of this Niemeyer-led team there is no reason big things should not be achievable.

### **Key Losses:**

Jefferson has very few losses from a team that went 32-7 last season and already has skilled replacements in place for those that did depart.

Catcher Nicole Marquart will be replaced by last year's DP freshman Maddie Hanson, who has big time potential.

Another loss that should be an easy fill is speedster Ashley Madsen, who shared time with senior Kailey Drake (.309) in center field.

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The biggest loss is long-time No. 2 pitcher Katie Naber (10-3, 1.49 ERA), who combined with ace Hannah Petersen for a scary 1-2 punch. Jefferson has three pitchers who got some varsity experience last season and one of them should be able to be satisfactory in the role.

“We have two younger pitchers that will be our No. 2 pitcher,” Niemeyer said. “I have been happy with them so far.”

### **Key Returning Players:**

Jefferson returns so much talent that I couldn't possibly list everyone here.

The whole batting lineup returns and will be keyed by senior Rachel Sedlacek (.447, 59 hits, 49 runs, 31 RBIs, 11 HR), the lead-off hitter who combines a great combo of power and speed. She has signed a letter of intent to play softball at UNI.

Sedlacek will be joined by the J-Hawk's other top 10 hitters from last year including junior Maddie Koolbeck (.386), senior power threat Kenna Fry (.374, 6 HR) and Hanson (.354). Petersen (.329), Carson Burgart (.295) and Hannah McInerney (.296) also are solid hitters.

Petersen (18-4, 0.88 ERA, 177 strikeouts) has been the ace of J-Hawk pitching staff since she was an eighth grader. When she is on she is nearly unhittable and will make this team very dangerous against any opponent.

### **Outlook:**

With the history of the Jefferson program, big things are again expected this year. The talent is there for the J-Hawks to meet all expectations and have a great year.

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The big question in the postseason is if the offense can produce. The J-Hawks were shutout by West Des Moines Dowling in last year's regional final.

"We have good pitching and defense," Niemeyer said. "Hitting will make or break us."

With another year together and a very motivated core group the bats should be able to put up enough runs to help Peterson win a lot of games and compete for a possible state title.

Jefferson will be very good this year and J-Hawk fans should be excited for potentially the best finish in three years from this loaded squad.