

Coach seeks 'Wildcat softball' mentality



Photo by Mackenzie Oberlander
Junior Kennedy Jehle tries to lay down a bunt in a Wildcat softball game last year.

By Lauren Callison

This season marks the 10-year anniversary of a Wildcat softball state title. Head Coach Aubrey Bland graduated in 2014 and started on the team that won state.

Coach Bland hopes her players will get to experience what she felt 10 years ago winning the title.

"Wildcat softball" is a term her former coach, Steve Hopkins, used for his players, Coach Bland said.

"I continue to use it as something to aim for," said Coach Bland. "Wildcat softball is a mindset, it's pride/passion, its ener-

gy, it's confidence. It's never giving up even if you're down four runs in the sixth inning because we know we can get the job done."

Coach Bland believes she saw that same "Wildcat softball" mentality come out in her players last season.

They defeated the North Cedar Knights in the first round of the playoffs but were knocked out by the Cardinal Comets in the second round 3-0.

The Wildcats ended the season with a record of 15-19.

"I always think we can compete harder and be better," said Coach Bland, who was proud of her team last year.

"The goal is to get it to be consistent so it's [Wildcat softball] every game, every inning, every pitch. If we can do that, there's no one these girls can't compete with."

After losing four key seniors last season, Coach Bland believes this is the perfect time for returning players to step up and fill their shoes.

The two highest batting averages came from two seniors last year, Ally Happ with a .424 and Shannon Head with a .372.

The highest returning average is junior Isabelle DeLong with an average of .289. For this season, the offensive approach remains the same for the Wildcats.

"Get the nine best in the lineup and let them do their thing," said Coach Bland. Last year, graduate Kylie Schult pitched 147.2 innings. Without her this season, ju-

nior Kennedy Jehle will be the primary pitcher. Jehle was the backup varsity pitcher last season, notching a total of 24.1 innings.

"It's never easy losing starters, especially in the pitching staff, but [it] opens up opportunities for others to step up and rise to the occasion," said Coach Bland.

Jehle is now ready to take on a leadership role for the Wildcats this season.

"I think that by being involved in the program for three years, I now understand the responsibilities that are expected of me," said Jehle.

"I don't feel the amount of innings I got last year will have an effect on how I lead on and off the field."

Jehle relies mainly on her fastball, changeup, rise ball, and has been working on her screwball. Her versatility is likely because of her years of experience before varsity softball.

"I started playing softball around 6 years old," said Jehle. "I also played on a local travel team until I was 13."

Coach Bland foresees eighth grader Isla Petersen contributing some innings as well.

"We are looking for Kennedy Jehle to be our leader on the mound, but also Isla Petersen will be doing some throwing for us as well," said Coach Bland. "There are several younger pitchers coming up with the eighth grade class. Anything can happen."

Petersen is looking forward to an

opportunity to pitch at the varsity level.

"There are some upperclassmen who pitch, but if I'm given the opportunity sometime, I would be very excited to do so," said Petersen. "I will play wherever the team and coaches need me and feel I can contribute to the team's success."

Like Jehle, Petersen has been playing ball for a very long time.

"I have been playing softball for as long as I can remember," said Petersen. "I got my first bat and ball at age 2 or 3, and it has been my favorite sport since then."

She has played for travel teams from Durant and Muscatine in the past, but she is currently playing for a travel team based out of Wilton.

"I think that being on the traveling team I am on now and playing against more competitive competition has helped me over the past few years," said Petersen. She also had a heavy softball influence from her father and grandfather.

"When I was growing up, my grandpa and dad taught me everything that I know about the game and continue to show up for me today," said Petersen.

The Wildcats will start the season off with a doubleheader on May 22 against the rival Wilton Beavers.

"I think that we have a good group of girls this year, and I'm excited to be around them and play the sport that I love," said Petersen.

Hurdle team follows footsteps of historic 1983 record holders

By Carlie Jo Fusco

The girls' track team is looking to take its shuttle hurdle relay team to the state meet for the third year in a row when it competes tonight at the 2A district meet in Tipton.

The team placed seventh overall last year but lost a runner, graduate Elizabeth Daufeldt.

This scenario was also faced 40 years ago when three members of the shuttle hurdle relay team placed 10th in 1982 but had to replace a graduate the next season and ended up setting a school record at the 1983 state meet. The record is one of the oldest for the girls' track team.

The hurdlers finished third at state in 1983 with a time of 1:05.43 and included Brenda (Schlapkohl) Meier, Lynette (Marolf) Buesing, Kristy (Delever) Russell, and Angie (Rathjen) Snell.

Buesing also placed fifth in the 100-meter hurdles at the state meet in 1983, and Meier competed in the high jump at state that year and still holds the school record for the high jump at 5'5".

"I can't believe it's been 40 years," Meier said about the shuttle hurdle relay record still standing.

Buesing and Meier both agreed that the way they prepared for races in their era was very different from how it is now.

"We might've [gone over hurdles in practice], but nothing like you should try to get better," Buesing said.

"We used to do everything on pure athletic ability," Meier said. "She [Coach Julie Woods] would give us a couple sprints or run three miles around town. We never lifted weights. We never really practiced."

Meier, Buesing, and Snell formed a close friendship in high school and were always seen together. That's how their chemistry for the relay was made.

"Even in basketball, we were all three forwards," Meier said. "There was a scrimmage where the other team asked if we were all related because we were all



Photo by Carlie Jo Fusco
Lynette (Marolf) Buesing and Brenda (Schlapkohl) Meier were part of the 1983 shuttle hurdle relay team.

blonds too."

These girls were fast enough to go to Drake Relays; however, they never got a chance to compete there.

"For Drake Relays, it wasn't that big of a thing back then," Buesing said. "For us, we were never in qualifying meets soon enough to go."

Interestingly enough, the school record board has the relay record time at 1:03.2 seconds. However, after doing research through the Iowa High School Girls Athletic Union, *Wilton-Durant Advocate News*, and the record holders themselves, the mistake was realized.

The 1983 team had a slight advantage over this year's team because the hurdles were set at 30 inches in 1983, and today the hurdles stand at 33 inches.

At the district meet tonight, the shuttle hurdle relay roster will include the three returning state qualifiers, senior Carlie Jo Fusco, junior Lainey Shelangoski, and junior Macyn Huston, along with newcomer junior Isabelle DeLong.

Coach Meyer returns to Wildcat diamond

By Isabelle DeLong

The Wildcats enter this season with a fresh start after losing 11 seniors and their veteran head coach Shawn Dierickx.

The Wildcats went 14-9 for the season last year. They beat Wilton in the first round of the postseason 7-6 and lost to Camanche in the second round 2-0. However, new Head Coach Colin Meyer has a history with the baseball program, heading up the varsity team from 2008 to 2017 before stepping down as a coach to spend time with his children.

Coach Meyer graduated from Durant in 2004. He then went on to pursue his baseball career on scholarship at Black Hawk College. He played for a year before he suffered a career-ending elbow injury.

The expectations for this season are high even with the loss of the 11 seniors.

"We've got a good group of kids that have been putting in a ton of work with the new coaching staff and have been working on fixing a lot of things, which has led to them seeing almost instant results," said Coach Meyer.

Freshman Colby Gast was a contributor to the varsity team last season as an eighth grader. He had five hits in ten at bats. Gast believes that getting varsity experience last year has helped him settle in for this season.

"Playing my eighth grade year helped me realize my strengths and weaknesses compared to the varsity level," said Gast. "It also benefited me by getting those first at-bats at the [varsity] level and getting the nerves out, so I will be confident going into this season."

Gast stepped away from wrestling and has focused his off-season time on baseball in order to prepare him for this season. Gast took part in a baseball program called 5-Tool at the TBK Bank Sports Complex in Bettendorf.

"I hit, threw, and did workouts 3-4 days a week from November through February," he said. "I've also been consistently

going to our high school open gyms multiple times a week."

Gast realizes that the team lost over half of their starters from last year but knows about all the new and remaining talent in the program.

"I believe we do have the players to step into those positions we lost though," said Gast. "We have a lot of talent that has been waiting behind that good senior class from last year."

With Coach Meyer coming back, he is also bringing back the culture he established in his first time coaching at Durant.

"We're trying to instill a culture where the boys realize that playing time is earned, not given, at all levels," said Coach Meyer. "We want the kids to strive to be at the varsity level, which we hope leads to more competition in practice at all levels, not only making each player better but each level."

Coach Meyer believes the team should have no problem this year with pitchers, listing off 11 Wildcats who have had pitching experience.

"We think we're going to have some depth at the varsity level for pitching this year," he said. "We haven't seen anyone that's going to be that dominant pitcher, but we have a lot of guys that are going to be extremely competitive and be able to eat up a lot of innings for us."

Coach Meyer also said that there is a good battle going for starting catcher between Garrett Hollenback and Wyatt Cole. The baseball players have been working out in open gyms since mid-January, Coach Meyer said.

"The coaching staff has stressed that if the kids want to work, we'll make ourselves available, and we've had numerous kids come early or stay late to work on things," he said. "Seeing kids put in the extra time to improve themselves is awesome to see. And seeing the numbers of kids that have been coming to offseason workouts is a great thing to see also."