

# Tough diamond losses spur summer teams

**Softball**  
**By Lauren Callison**

After a grand slam ended a shot at the state tournament last summer, the Wildcat softball team has been working hard in the offseason to erase that memory.

The team concluded its 2024 season with a 4-2 loss to the Northeast Rebels in the regional final after taking a 2-0 lead in the top of the fifth inning.

“I beat myself up about it heavily for about two weeks,” said sophomore pitcher Allison Toft, who gave up the grand slam to the Rebels’ Madison Kluever in the bottom of the fifth.

“I struggled with the fact that it was a singular pitch that could have affected the game’s outcome. But I realized there was nothing I could do about it now.”

The tough loss beat the whole team up, as it wasn’t just one pitch that could’ve changed the scope of the game.

“I can easily say almost every girl on the team was upset about that outcome,” said Macy Ray, the only senior returning for the Wildcats this season.

Ray and Toft believe that loss is fueling their motivation for the upcoming season.

“We want to be at state so badly, and we have come such a long way from the previous years,” said Ray. “All of us put in so much work in the offseason, and as a team, we are ready for the results to pay off.”

The Wildcats set up the showdown with Northeast after rallying for seven runs in the seventh inning to defeat Louisa-Muscataine 8-6 the game before.

“We all felt how close we were to going to state, so it’s pushing us to make it there this year,” said Toft.

The coaching staff has held open gyms since October, and most of the girls on the team, other sports permitting, have been

in regular attendance.

“I think as a team we need to work on situational awareness, like if the ball were hit to me, what should I do?” said Toft. “It’s the small things that could cost you a game, so we have hit those things heavily in open gyms and will continue to do so.”

Ray believes she has a leadership role to fill as the only senior to enter this season.

“I do feel a lot of pressure to step up for these girls as the only senior, but I am ready, and I want my last year to be a great year for everyone,” Ray said.

Ray has recently signed to continue to play softball for Black Hawk College next year.

“Playing at the next level has always been a dream for me,” said Ray. “I’ve known I wanted to play longer since I was 10 years old.”

Ray and the rest of the team’s love for the game of softball will push them to achieve their goals this season.

“I love the game,” said Ray. “It has taught me a lot, and I know there is more to come for us.”

**Baseball**  
**By Paige Happ**

After Durant’s back-to-back tough playoff losses the past two seasons, the Wildcats are looking forward to beginning the 2025 season strong.

To end Durant’s 2024 season, the Wildcats fell to Tipton, 12-7, in the first game of the playoffs. The Wildcats beat the Tigers three times in the regular season.

Two seasons ago, the Mid-Prairie Golden Hawks thumped the Wildcats 11-0 in a district semifinal game.

Head Coach Colin Meyer is going into his third season leading the Wildcats and is confident in his team and its ability to be successful this year.



Photo by Gus Thoma  
Junior Bailey Kraklio frames a pitch from sophomore Allison Toft in the playoff game against the Northeast Rebels.

“Ending the season with the loss no matter who you play is hard,” said Coach Meyer. “For some of the team, it might fire them up, but this will be a new team with a lot of new players.”

Coach Meyer hopes to make a deep playoff run this season.

“Obviously we want to win as many games as possible leading to a conference championship and a state tournament run, but it would be nice to see more guys get some individual awards,” he said.

The Wildcats lost two of their leading pitchers, graduates Ryan Wulf and Collier Rockow. But Coach Meyer says six pitchers, including ERA leader Colby Gast, could see action on the mound.

“It’s never easy to replace seniors, but it seems like no matter what, you’ve always got kids that will step in to fill the void,” said Coach Meyer.

Gast, who led the team in hitting with a batting average of .442 and pitching with an ERA of .191, is also expected to be a clubhouse leader this season.

“I feel I have a leadership role on this team,” he said. “We are going to need some guys to step up this year and fill some spots, so I am trying to help them get settled in.”

Gast set high expectations for both himself and his team this season.

“This year the team needs to come in with a more positive attitude,” said Gast. “We need to focus on staying disciplined throughout the whole year, as it kind of fell off as the season went. If we trust each other and ourselves, we can do good things.”

Gast added, “Lastly, we all just

need to have fun because that’s the whole point of the game.”

Coach Meyer is glad to have Gast back for his junior season. Gast also led the team with 20 stolen bases, 38 hits, and a .987 fielding percentage.

“He’s been a phenomenal player and a leader for this team,” he said. “Any time you get players like that returning, it’s a huge advantage for the upcoming season.”

Gast isn’t settling and wants to continue to improve his overall game.

“I plan on maintaining and improving by keeping my approach I had last year and being mentally strong throughout the year,” he said. “I need to stay the same through my slumps and hit streaks.”

Gast is really looking forward to the start of the season when the Wildcats open against Wilton on May 19 at home.

“I think we have the chance to be a good team this year and do a lot of great things,” he said. “The conference will be tough this year, so we will have to step up and match it.”

Gast has been working on his skills in the offseason as well.

“I have been going to all the open gyms for the high school, as well as hitting with my hitting coach in North Liberty,” he said.

Another returning starter, senior Conner Schwarz, hit a .298 last season and had 31 total hits.

“My goals this year are just to win games and help out the team as much as I can this year,” said Schwarz. “I’m gonna try to help the younger kids out if they have any questions.”



Senior Conner Schwarz bats in the playoff game last season against the Tipton Tigers.

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Freshman Brynn Goettsch has been participating in track and field for four years. She runs in the shuttle hurdle relay and the 100-meter hurdles and throws shot put. Her personal record for shot put is 29 feet 11 inches. Her goal for this season is to make it to state for shot put. Her favorite part about track is socializing and competing.

Goettsch

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Senior Brady Daufeldt has been participating in track and field for eight years. Daufeldt competes in the shuttle hurdle relay, the 110-meter hurdles, the 400-meter dash, the high jump, and other relays. His goal for this season is to make it to state for multiple events. His favorite part of the sport is competing.

Daufeldt

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Sophomore Colton Buesing has been golfing for two years. Buesing’s personal best for 18 holes is a score of 103. His most memorable moment is golfing under 50 on a 9-hole course for the first time. He is excited to play the sport throughout his life.

Buesing

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Cade Pickart has been competing in track and field for three years. Pickart runs in the 200-meter dash and 200-meter hurdles and throws the discus. His goals are improving his times and throwing distance. His favorite part is talking to athletes from other schools.

Pickart