

Returning starters look to lead Louisburg softball



Louisburg senior Allyssa Griggs will serve as the Lady Cats' starting pitcher last season after earning second team all-Frontier League honors last season.

It may have had a below .500 record last season, but for the Louisburg softball team, it was a year where the Lady Cats took several steps forward.

After not winning a game in 2015, the Lady Cats responded with five wins in 2016 and were on the doorstep of winning a few more – losing five games by two runs or less. Now in 2017, Louisburg hopes it can improve even more as it returns several starters from last season.

“Even though we have battled the weather, illness and other high school commitments, the girls have been working extremely hard each day at practice,” Louisburg coach John Ozier said.

The Lady Cats will have a veteran look and they will be led by their three seniors in Allyssa Griggs, Emalee Overbay and Hailey Crowder. Louisburg also returns six players who saw significant varsity time a year ago.

Griggs will be the team's starting pitcher this season after earning second team all-Frontier League honors last year. She started 12 games for Louisburg and struck out 66 batters to 39

walks in 93 innings.

Along with her arm, Griggs is also one of the Lady Cats' top returning bats. She finished with a .352 average last season and had 25 hits that included five doubles, three triples and a home run to go along with 21 RBIs.

Her battery mate is Overbay as she returns as the team's starting catcher – a position where she earned honorable mention all-league honors in 2016. Overbay was second on the team in with a .400 average and had 32 hits with a team-high 10 doubles, five triples, a home run and 20 RBIs.



Senior Emalee Overbay is one of three seniors on the Lady Cat roster and one the top returning bats for Louisburg.

The defense behind Griggs will look familiar as well as three of the four spots return. Sophomores Molly Rison (first base), Kennia Hankinson (shortstop) and Karson Griggs (third base) all hope to take a step forward.

Rison had a strong freshman season last year as she earned

honorable mention all-league honors after she batted .368 with 25 hits. She also added five doubles, a home run and 17 RBIs.

Joining the infield will be fellow sophomore Madison Svoboda, who missed all of last season with an injury, but Ozier hopes Svoboda and some other girls can step up and fill some holes.

"We have some additional sophomores and juniors that may be given an opportunity at the varsity level," Ozier said. "In addition, we have a number of talented freshmen that may be called upon to contribute on varsity as well."

Crowder and sophomore Bailey Kern will play in the outfield, while freshmen Paige Eccher and Allison Boles could see time there as well. Ozier also said freshmen Lauren Cutshaw, Kayla Willey and Reilly Ratliff might have an opportunity to crack the varsity roster.

The Lady Cats will also feature two new assistant coaches – Karlie (Stuteville) O'Hara and Lynsey (Randolph) Sheely – both who are former players themselves.

"This is my second year as head coach and I was fortunate enough to add two quality assistants," Ozier said. "They have put in a lot of extra work in preparing for this season and the players have quickly determined the skill-base that both coaches bring to the field each day. I am excited to work with both of them."

Louisburg opens its season at 4 p.m. today when it travels to Paola for a doubleheader. The Lady Cats will host Prairie View in their home opener on April 6.

The Lady Cats have spent the last couple of weeks working on fundamentals to get them prepared for the season and they are ready to see some live competition.

"One of our program's emphasis is getting all of the 'little things' right," Ozier said. "We drill and practice many of the

basic skills each day to embed those into their reactions during real game situations.

“As far as team goals are concerned, we don’t really have any ‘catchy’ phrases to describe our approach. The girls know that we expect hard work, focus and a true team effort each day at practice, and eventually, during the games.”