

Lady Cat softball hopes to build on last season



Louisburg junior Karson Griggs is one of three returning all-Frontier League players from last year as she joins fellow juniors Maddie Svoboda and Molly Rison to lead the Lady Cats this season. Louisburg opens its season Thursday in Paola.

On paper, the Louisburg High School softball team returns several starters from last season's team that finished with a 10-11 record.

Even with that, the Lady Cats will still feature a lot of youth at many key positions after losing two all-league players, including starting pitcher Allyssa Griggs and catcher Emalee Overbay.

Still, Louisburg brings back three all-Frontier League players in juniors Maddie Svoboda, Karson Griggs and Molly Rison to help bolster the lineup and lead a group of young Lady Cats.

"We currently have 24 girls on the high school squad this year," Louisburg coach John Ozier said. "We have been able to get outside so far for most practices, which allows us to get in more productive work. We have been working hard on the basics, along with acclimating some of the new and returning players to new/multiple positions."

Svoboda will be a main fixture in the infield for Louisburg

after she earned second team all-league honors last season. She was also one of the top offensive producers as she finished with a .414 average and had 29 hits, nine doubles, a triple, a home run and 11 RBIs.



Louisburg coach John Ozier congratulates Maddie Svoboda after a home run last season.

Karson Griggs could play all over the diamond for Louisburg after earning an honorable mention Frontier League spot last year. Griggs finished with a team-high 32 hits and had a .438 average to go along with eight doubles, a triple and a home run. She was also tied for second on the team with 20 RBIs.

Rison, who will play first base and catcher for Louisburg, also had big offensive numbers last year with a .358 average, three doubles, three home runs and 14 RBIs. She was also named to the honorable mention all-league team a year ago.

Those three players will get a lot of help from several underclassmen. Junior Bailey Kern will see time in the outfield along with sophomores Lauren Cutshaw and Kayla Willey. Cutshaw will also split time with Rison behind the plate.

Senior Skylar Keaton, junior Bailey Sarna, along with sophomores Shayla Meyer, Paige Eccher, August Daniels, Reilly Ratliff-Becher and freshman Alyse Moore could all see time on the varsity stage as well.

"I am looking for some of these girls to step up and really help us this year," Ozier said. "Whether the girls are playing varsity, junior varsity, or both, we are emphasizing on an everyday basis the importance of playing this game with passion and energy at practice, and eventually in games. Our girls seem to mesh well together and are working hard."

Louisburg will lack experience on the mound this season as junior Kelsey Higginbotham returns after pitching just handful of games last year. Sarna and Karson Griggs will also compete for time on the Lady Cat pitching staff with Meyer and Daniels.

"They have been working hard to get ready for the season," Ozier said. "We will see who is able to make the most strides during the season to vie for the most time."

Even with a lot inexperience, Ozier said he is looking for his team to take another step forward from last year and he is enjoying working with this group of girls.

"We know that we let a few wins get away from us last year, so extra emphasis will be given to bearing down and finishing all games stronger this year," Ozier said. "Our goals for this year are to work hard in practice, develop a sense of unity among teammates and compete hard. More than anything, we want to walk away from the season with pride and enjoyment."

The Lady Cats were scheduled to open their season at home against Paola on Thursday, but the doubleheader has been moved to Paola due to wet field conditions at Lewis-Young Park. First pitch is still set for 4:30 p.m.