

C-J Sports

Softball season will open with many question marks

By Richard A. Kiley

Many questions surround this year's girls' softball season for diocesan high schools. Can Cardinal Mooney win consistently without ace pitcher Julie Staub? Can Bishop Kearney win despite key losses in personnel from last year's Private-Parochial runner-up to Mooney? Can Mercy Coach Paul Walker and Nazareth Coach Dave Pisano continue to revitalize the programs at their respective schools? Will Pat Luzzi put softball on the map at DeSales? And can Wayne Coburn take the Elmira Notre Dame softball team beyond the Western Regionals?

Only time and results will tell.

Cardinal Mooney Coach Joette Abbey says her girls have something to prove this season.

"People on the outside say we won just because of Julie (Staub), but there are some excellent ballplayers here," said Abbey, who is about to begin her 13th year at Mooney. "We want to prove we won because of Julie, plus good offense and good defense."

No argument there. Just think back to Mooney's heartbreaking loss to Hilton in the Section 5 Class AA final last season, and remember the fielding clinic put on by shortstop Lori Padulo and outfielder Josette Riola. The Lady Cards also had their chances to score, but failed to capitalize on their opportunities.

But regardless of who or what was responsible for Mooney's success the past four years, Staub will be sorely missed. Even without her ace, though, Abbey has the talent to make it back to the final game, and this season will prove there is "life after Staub at Mooney."

Padulo, a senior, brings her magnetic glove and .364 batting average back, as well as her team-high three homeruns. First baseman Tracy Schmidt (.377), who led the team in extra-base hits with nine last season, is also back for her senior year. Senior catcher Marybeth Prognio (.339) hopes to make it through the season without aggravating a knee injury, and Teresa (.426) and Cathy Nietopski (.333) bring experience to the outfield and infield respectively.

Junior Noel Feeney, who pitched well for Paul Forte's junior varsity squad, and sophomore Cheryl Lennox will need to pick up the slack for Staub's missing mastery on the mound. Lennox will also see action in the infield and outfield positions.

Julie Kolb (.308), Lisa Serio, Sue Moriarity, Amy DeBurro, and Jennifer Feder give Abbey plenty of depth.

Abbey is taking a game-by-game approach, however, realizing that she may run into problems with her team's pitching.

"If we do get into trouble it will be because of pitching," said Abbey, whose team has compiled a 15-6 record last season. "That's our biggest concern. But I'm optimistic... the talent is there. We'll take it a game at a time."

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For a good part of last season, it looked as if Linda D'Onofrio's Bishop Kearney squad was going to take the Private-Parochial League title with relative ease. D'Onofrio's girls beat Mooney twice during the regular season, but were plagued by losing games they should have won. The end result was an 8-6 record, 4-3 in the all-Catholic league and a quarterfinal loss to Mooney in the sectionals.

"Last year we ran into a couple of games where we didn't play well, and then we had trouble getting our confidence back up," said D'Onofrio, who relinquished her league chairman responsibilities to Paul Walker of Mercy, and is now Section 5 softball co-chairman.

The 13th-year Lady Fighting King coach will have to win this year without two inspirational leaders from last season's team. Josie Raimond, who is now catching for Hamilton College, is gone, as is sophomore Melanie Lipka, who transferred to Webster High School this year.

Senior Molly Dillon (.350) is back for Kearney, though. Dillon's glove proved to be Mooney's undoing during one game last season. Junior Kelli Curcio will also see time pitching, in addition to her infielding chores, and junior Julie Natale will be looked to for some hitting. Senior Ann Marie Rivaldo and junior Monique Mate will also need to hit consistently for D'Onofrio.

Rounding out the squad are Jan Longdue, Jodi DuMont, Martha Riester, Pam Buddendeck, Carrie Caruso, Shari Bell and Jill Newman. Buddendeck may also aid in the pitching responsibilities.

"We have new faces, new talent, and we've always made it to the sectionals. And they don't want to be the team not to," D'Onofrio said.



Courier-Journal file photo

The finesse of Melanie Lipka (forefront) brought many opponents to their knees last spring. Her transfer out of Kearney leaves the Lady Fighting Kings at a loss.

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McQuaid boys' basketball coach Joe Marchese, who is also assistant principal at the all-boys high school in Brighton, achieved success in his first year with the varsity, so why couldn't a principal's secretary? Donna Paro, the principal's secretary at Aquinas Institute, is taking over the reins from former softball and soccer coach Mary Beth Sadler.

Paro will be without the services of a standout for the Little Irish last season, Ellen Fredericks, who transferred to Gates-Chili in the off-season.

The first-year coach will need clutch pitching from sophomores Sheri Arnell and Michelle Cerra if she hopes to knock off rivals Kearney or Mooney.

Catcher Kath Heid, a junior, and Jennifer Martin, a transfer student, will also need big seasons. First-year player Terri Seiler, who ran track last spring, should prove a welcome

addition to the varsity girls' team.

Paro, who is active in the Chili town softball league, will not be able to rely on the services of Donna Enright, however. The senior standout in soccer, basketball and softball opted not to go out this spring, and appears to be resting up for the soccer program at MCC this fall.

Paro doesn't seem to be bothered by the unsettling situation. "I plan to use the bench; we have experience at some positions," Paro said. "They have the will (to play), and that's half the battle."

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Our Lady of Mercy softball Coach Paul Walker remembers last season all too well. After finishing the regular season at 7-6, his Monarchs moved into the sectionals and lost a heartbreaking 8-7 contest to Fairport.

The SUNY College at Brockport graduate hopes his fortunes are a little better this year.

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Mother Nature may send opening baseball games to the showers

By Richard A. Kiley

Mother Nature permitting, the boys of spring will return to the baseball diamonds this week.

Heavy rainfall has left the scheduled start of the high school campaign in jeopardy, after unseasonably warm and sunny weather in March. The stint of balmy weather had allowed coaches of the six boys' baseball teams in the diocese to get an unaccustomed jump on preparations for the upcoming season, before recent inclement conditions brought them back down to earth.

Nevertheless, here is a breakdown of how diocesan teams will battle opponents along with the elements this spring.

Although many of his peers are picking Carm Urzetta's Bishop Kearney squad to finish near or at the top of the City-Catholic League this season, the 16th-year Fighting King coach isn't so sure.

Urzetta lost most of his infield from last year's 15-7 team to graduation. Gone from last year's sectional quarterfinal loser to Fairport are second baseman John Burke, shortstop Rob Alexander and third baseman Fred Brightman. Rick Alexander, who won six games on the mound for Kearney last season, is also history.

So why does just about everybody like the Fighting Kings' chances this year?

That's easy. Steve Arriola.

The talented lefthander is back for his final season at Kearney after several impressive performances in his junior campaign. Among his pitching gems was a 16-strikeout performance against McQuaid at Silver Stadium last May.

Yet his coach calls the team's pitching "a major concern."

"Steve (Arriola) had a rough summer; he didn't pitch well in the (American) Legion," said Urzetta, who teaches history at Kearney. "He got rocked around pretty good."

Urzetta can't afford for Arriola to have a rough spring, because his other ace, Sott Valyear, is experiencing discomfort in his throwing arm due to a hockey injury. That may force the Kearney coach into using senior Eric Jones, normally a utility player for the Fighting Kings, as a possible hurler.

To fill in for the losses up the middle, R.D. Long, who started as a freshman, will move in from his outfield position to take on the duties at shortstop, while Penfield-transfer Scott Thompson, a junior, will start the season at second base. Todd Stoffle, who also transferred into Kearney, will assume the catching responsibilities. Team captain Joe Falbo will once again start at first base for Urzetta, and slugger Don Weigand will be the designated hitter and back up Stoffle behind the plate.

A slew of sophomores and juniors will

battle it out for the outfield spots. Falbo's younger brother, Vince, and Aaron Williams, both sophomores, should see ample playing time in the outfield for Kearney.

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After a mediocre 12-9 season last spring, Cardinal Mooney Coach Ed Nietopski hopes to recapture the mood that has propelled his Cardinals to nearly 450 wins against just 95 losses in his 23 years at the Grace high school. The Mooney coach and athletic director will need strong pitching from his ace on the pitching staff, Mike Magans, as well as from seniors Craig Banaszewski and lefthander Steve Blake. Nietopski will also depend heavily upon two underclassmen, Scott Quinlan and Scott Hylan.

The Cardinal coach's key returning player is senior captain John Mason, who batted .375 for Mooney last season. Senior Steve Olek, who turned in a respectable .275 at the plate for the Cards last spring, returns to second base. Brian Puffer is back at first base, and junior Pat Corrigan will be behind the plate. A freshman, Greg Wachala, will play shortstop for Nietopski, and Charlie Sciortino, a sophomore, should see some action either as catcher or at third.

Senior Paul Brescia, who covers the ground as well as any outfielder in the City-Catholic League, will be the starting

centerfielder, and Steve Miesenzahl, a .370 hitter last year, returns to rightfield. Rob Hrankowski, Mark Bartlett (.310) and Dave Brescia are vying for the left field spot.

As in the past, Nietopski has scheduled upstate titans Syracuse Bishop Grimes and Hornell near the conclusion of the regular season to ready his club for the sectionals.

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McQuaid is coming off a dismal 7-12 season, one in which high school baseball experts — McQuaid Coach Tim Jordan included — picked the Knights to win the City-Catholic League with relative ease.

"The gods were against us," Jordan said jokingly. "But that's not an excuse... it was a quagmire year."

According to the Knights' mentor, his club hit an impressive .294 over 19 games last season, but was plagued with inconsistent pitching and fielding. Arm troubles for ace pitcher Jon Knight also added to Jordan's woes.

Many members of last year's team, which did recover from its maladies to play nearly perfectly in a 2-1 sectional loss to Fairport, have graduated. Included in the mass exodus were leftfielder Kurt Washburn (.462), centerfielder Mike Fina (.436), pitcher Kevin Tefft (.333), first baseman Steve Hettrich (.326) and catcher Mike Newcomb (.308).

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