

Softball

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He'll have to do it, however, without several key players from last year's team. Outfielder Donna Grady graduated and Rita LaForce and Colleen Gartland have transferred elsewhere. To make matters tougher for Walker, Julie Seitz has decided not to go out for the team this year.

Those returning are leftfielder Beth Wambach and her sister, Laura. According to Walker, both had high on-base percentages for Mercy last season, with Laura Wambach leading off and Beth batting third.

Injuries have also created headaches for Walker. Senior Kristen Harris, a third-year rightfielder, is experiencing back problems, and centerfielder Jackie Bryan has a sprained ankle. Third-year player Jenni Baxter, who can play any position, probably will, given the uncertainty created by other players' injuries.

Junior Mollie Board will be called upon to handle most of the pitching chores, with

Baxter giving her an occasional rest when necessary.

A transfer student from Michigan, Ana Dupre, will assume the catching duties, while Beth Schaffer will play first base. Junior Caylee Stahl will be the Monarch second baseman, with Laura Wambach at short and Beth Hebert at third base for the second consecutive year. Beth Wambach and Baxter make up a more than capable left and center field duo, while Karen Fisher appears to have the upper hand in right field.

Over in Class D, a pretty sizable task awaits first-year coach Pat Luzzi at DeSales High School. And although he is new to the high school ranks, he brings to the small Catholic secondary school a wealth of experience from his work with youth softball leagues in the Geneva area.

Luzzi takes over the program from Corky Deyulio, who has since moved on to Syracuse University, where he is trying his luck with the girls' softball program there.

Luzzi lost quite a battery from last year's semifinal loser to Cohocton in pitcher Stephanie DeVaney and catcher Michelle Trotta. The two Lady Saints were DeSales'

standouts for the past three seasons.

Stephanie's sister, Babette, as well as Kris Guinan, are back, though, giving the first-year Saint coach two superb athletes to build his team around.

Luzzi is hoping to prominently position the softball program at DeSales, which has traditionally taken a back seat to the girls' soccer and basketball programs, by also recruiting Jody Murray from the ranks of youth softball coaches. Together, the two hope to instill the same winning tradition the Saints have enjoyed in other sports.

"I do want to make the sectionals, do well in the sectionals and do the best we can in the league," said Luzzi, who will compete in the Finger Lakes West Division. "I'm looking to finish in the top half of the league, but at this point I don't know if that's realistic or not."

Wayne Coburn's Lady Crusader softball team caught fire after an 8-8 regular season last spring to win the Section 4 Class C championship over Deposit in his first season coaching the varsity girls at Elmira Notre Dame. Unfortunately for opponents of ND this season, first baseman Amy Potter was

the lone player to graduate from the 1986 squad, which eventually fell in the West Regional to Wilson High School of Buffalo.

Key returning players are pitcher Kris Vetukevic, who opened the new season with a no-hitter against Athens in a game won by ND, 20-0. The senior hurler pitched every game in the sectionals for Coburn last season. Also back are junior first baseman Jennifer Dewey, junior second baseman Lisa Bousas and junior shortstop Nat Kozlowski. Third baseman Tina Maloney, leftfielder Lisa Johnston, centerfielder Mary Hardiman and rightfielder Stacey McMail have also returned.

Like the other sports programs at Elmira ND, the softball program reaps the benefits of a grueling regular season against Class A and B schools, and the Lady Crusaders typically enter the sectionals well-prepared.

"The competition makes it easier, but we want to get a better seeding this year," said Coburn, whose girls were seeded seventh in the sectional tourney last year.

With some teams in the Sullivan Trail conference in transition this season, Coburn may see his girls finish higher in the STC standings as well.

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Dan Peacock and Brian Sprague are also gone.

One would think that losing so many from a team that finished a disappointing fourth in the City-Catholic League would leave the 19th-year Knight coach trembling.

Not Jordan, and for good reason. He has All City-Catholic pitcher and third baseman Chip Golembeski (.289) back as well as second baseman Dan O'Mara (.363). In addition to the two seniors, the McQuaid athletic director will also have Dave Schroeder and Peter Kowal returning.

Juniors Steve Wilmarth and John Baxter give McQuaid decent but relatively untested pitching arms. Scott Hebert, a senior catcher, brings stability to the other half of the battery. Todd Gonnuci, a junior first baseman, and Steve Schott, who can play both the infield and outfield, will also need to assert themselves.

Aquinas Institute Coach Richard Pilliter hopes his 13th season is a lucky one. The Little Irish coach knows he'll need more than luck though, especially after losing seven

infielders from last year's 16-7 squad, which won the City-Catholic League. Pilliter lost power-hitting first baseman Mike Flanagan, catcher Lou Germain, shortstop Jim Kartes, leftfielder George Dougherty and second baseman Tim Reynders on graduation day. And if that weren't enough, pitcher/outfielder Dan Cooney, a sophomore, and junior Garrett Cummings both transferred during the off-season.

Junior ace pitcher Mark Chapman is back — well, sort of. Pilliter's leading stopper in '86, Chapman (5-2) has been bothered by an arm injury he sustained during football season.

"He's off throwing for three weeks," said Pilliter, who is a social studies teacher and guidance counselor at the Catholic high school on Dewey Avenue. "I imagine I won't have him for the first five to eight games."

Brian Monteleone, a pitcher/third baseman, is back, as is leftfielder Joe Altobelli.

According to Pilliter, the onslaught of new talent to choose from is making it difficult to see who will play this year. The first base, second base and catcher positions are still being fought for. Junior Fred Rogers and sophomore Jim Delly are vying for the second base spot, while junior Mike Germain and junior John Messura are battling it out for first base. Messura and Dave Travaglini

are both shooting to play behind the play. Chris Culver, a transfer from Jefferson High, has nailed down the starting position at shortstop.

Sophomore Jim Schrader, who saw much action on the junior varsity team last spring, is expected to start in centerfield. Senior Jon Luconte will be asked to pitch, in addition to playing the outfield.

The key to Aquinas' year, however, may rest on the arm of 6'3" junior Eric Knapp, especially in the absence of Chapman. Pilliter said Knapp came around in the second half of the season last year and pitched ably down the stretch.

Second-year Elmira Notre Dame baseball coach John Cain won't see many familiar faces this spring. Like Pilliter, he graduated seven players from last year's 13-12 team, which fell in the sectional quarterfinals. Included in the graduation day departures were top pitcher Paul Ponzi, first baseman Tom Gough (.450, 10 homeruns), second baseman John Maloney (.375) and shortstop Dan Gizzi (.330). According to Cain, Jim Polcyn's clutch hitting and the defensive play of Danny Maloney and Mike Johnston will also be sorely missed.

The Crusaders' chances of making noise in the always-tough Sullivan Trail Conference will be bolstered, however, by a core of

players returning from last season and by those moving up from the junior varsity.

Lee Wissnawski, the starting catcher as a junior, and Mike Mesuch, who performed well as the number-two pitcher to Ponzi last season, make a better-than-average battery.

Also back are senior J.P. Bernatavitz, who will play shortstop this season after splitting duties between leftfield and shortstop last spring, and first baseman Sean Tierney. Those up from JV include juniors Joe Long, Jim Ermold, Mike Saxe, pitcher Kevin Harney, second baseman John Cox and Randy Harvey. Bob Grosvenor, a sophomore, will play centerfield and pitch for Cain. Tom Daly, Charlie Russell, Mike Christastie, Craig Milazzo and Donnie Sheehan have also made the cut.

The Crusaders, who dropped their first contest to Athens last Friday, April 3, by a score of 4-1, will embark on their traditional trip to Myrtle Beach in mid-April. The venture during Easter break allows the Class C school in Section 4 to get in some quality playing time against several top schools down south.

Another highlight to the Crusaders' season is the Elmira Tournament scheduled for early May. Competing in the annual tourney will be ND, Elmira Free Academy, Southside, Horseheads, Edison and Williamsport, among others.

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