

Sports

Diocesan girls' softball teams begin quest for sectional spots

By Richard A. Kiley

For the Cardinal Mooney girls' varsity softball team, last year's championship season will be tough to top. The Lady Cardinals did what nobody thought could happen when they roughed up Hilton's Bridgette Newman during a 10-6 victory in last June's midnight-hour win over the Cadets in the Section 5 Class AA final game. The Mooney win broke Newman's 40-game winning streak.

Last season was good to Elmira Notre Dame's girls as well — but it could have been better. For the second consecutive year, the Lady Crusaders were the best team to come out of Section 4 Class C, only to stumble against Wilson High of Buffalo in the Far West Regionals, 11-6.

Other diocesan girls teams besides Mooney and Notre Dame will be looking for post-season success this spring.

Here is an overview of what to expect from this year's teams.

LAST SUMMER MARKED the end of a legacy at Cardinal Mooney High School, when Joette Abbey stepped down from her softball and volleyball coaching positions. Abbey, who coached at the Greece high school for 13 years, accrued more than 300 combined wins on the softball diamond and volleyball court. During her illustrious tenure, Abbey's teams won six Private-Parochial League titles and two sectional championships in softball.

It's still business as usual at Mooney, however, with former junior-varsity softball coach Paul Forte at the helm. Forte is no stranger to the coaching ranks at Mooney. In addition to his six years as JV softball coach, he has coached the Cards' varsity soccer team for the past eight seasons.

Senior pitcher Noelle Feeney — one of Mooney's co-captains — is the class pitcher in the Private-Parochial League this season. As a relatively untested junior last spring, Feeney pitched gems against Irondequoit, Fairport and Hilton to lead her team to the sectional title. Taking Marybeth Progno's position behind the plate will be junior co-captain Shannon Barry, who caught for Forte on the junior varsity last year. Barry is fresh from a stellar season on the basketball court, where Forte watched the hoop player lead her teammates to the semifinals of Class AA.

Junior Cheryl Lennox is also back and will see action at third base and/or shortstop. Lennox was one of the leading hitters on last year's team as a sophomore. Another star on Morrison's team, Marisa Shakelford, will take Tracy Schmidt's place at first base.

An under-rated Julie Kolb is back in the outfield. Kolb had a key bases-loaded triple in last year's championship win over the Cadets, and has the speed and fielding prowess to cover the ground in center field. Senior right fielder Cindy Shalenberger will play in right field, with Margie McGuire moving to left field. McGuire may also see some time at the hot corner while Forte experiments — much as he does with his soccer players — with some girls playing at several positions.

"We're going to gain maturity as the year goes on; these are the youngest players I've had on any varsity team sport at Mooney," said Forte, whose team is off to a 2-0 start with wins over Greece Aracadia and Aquinas.

MERCY IS OFF to its best start ever under fifth-year coach Paul Walker with three consecutive wins. One of those came against traditionally strong Churchville-Chili, 6-4, in an extra-inning thriller on Friday, April 15. The other victories have come against Marshall and Nazareth.

Walker is still trying to put softball on the map at the all-girls' school on Blossom Road, and this may be the year his Monarchs do something big.



Aquinas' Jen Martin knocks the ball from the glove of Mooney pitcher Noelle Feeney during fourth-inning action of the Lady Cards' 13-5 win over the Little Irish at Mooney.

Two fourth-year players in pitcher Jenni Baxter and co-captain Laura Wambach return to form an outstanding battery. Baxter is usually right around the plate with her pitches, and Wambach hit .380 for Mercy last spring as an infielder/outfielder.

Mercy's other co-captain is third-year varsity player Beth Hebert, who will return to play third base for the Monarchs. Hebert is the kind of leader — both on and off the field — a team needs to go far. Sophomore Kim Caccamise is back at second base for her second season on the varsity. Erin Baumer, who played first base on the Mercy junior-varsity season, will play that position on the varsity this year.

Two newcomers to the team, Julie Buntich and Rene Burkhardt, give Mercy even more potential. A natural athlete, Buntich played softball at Rush-Henrietta last spring and more recently helped carry Kathy Boughton's varsity basketball team to the Class AA semis this past winter. A city-school transfer, Burkhardt played with both Laura and Beth Wambach at St. Louis School in Pittsford when all three were in grammar school.

As part of a league-wide experiment this year, Private-Parochial League teams will see each other three times instead of two, a measure Walker welcomes enthusiastically.

ANOTHER NEWCOMER to the varsity ranks is Dave Riesenberger, who will coach the varsity at Bishop Kearney this season. Riesenberger coached the junior varsity at Kearney for eight years, and this year takes over the varsity program from Linda D'Onofrio, who has moved on to the Fairport School District.

Although he lost pitcher/infielder Ann Marie Rivaldo and infielder Molly Dillon to graduation, Riesenberger has a lot of returning talent from last year's 9-8 team — a first-round loser in the sectionals to Hornell.

Three fourth-year players provide the nucleus of the team. Pitcher/infielder Kelli Curcio will be the team's main stopper, while utility player Monique Mate and first baseman Julie Natale also provide Riesenberger with experienced leadership.

Other returners include junior outfielders Jill Newman and Carrie Caruso as well as junior catcher Shari Bell.

Riesenberger also has several players up from last year's junior-varsity team, which went 7-1 (9-5 overall) against Catholic school competition. Sophomore outfielders Kate Dillon and Wendy Isaacs will see a lot of action, as will junior infielder Carol Missel, sophomore pitcher Ann Stockslader and sophomore infielder Sandy Supple.

"We don't have a lot of power, but we seem to have some real contact hitters," said Riesenberger, a math teacher at Kearney. "We think we have some potential, it's just a matter of putting it all together."

LIFE WITHOUT Paula Short may prove a little tough for Nazareth coach Dave Pisano, but the school musical "Annie" is making his life even tougher. The ninth-year coach will be without the services of a few players until the curtain falls on the school musical, causing him to use some otherwise untested talent in the meantime.

The graduation of Short (.415 BA, led the

team with 6 HRs), who was a four-year player for Pisano, will hurt, but the return of Amy Budd will ease the pain. This will be Budd's third season on the varsity, and she's coming off an outstanding junior season (.393, 4 HRs) in which she was named to the All Private-Parochial League squad.

Senior center fielder Leslie Salladin (.296) and senior first baseman Samantha Schramm (.306) also return this year for Nazareth. Pisano will also benefit from the return of juniors Jackie Sojka and Kris Mattie, who both saw ample playing time last season.

Sophomore Melissa Creamer — who hit .340 as a freshman — and freshman Jennifer Olley give Pisano some youth to build around. Junior pitcher/outfielder Nicole Olley is a top newcomer for Pisano, whose team finished 14-7 and fell to Rush Henrietta in the first round of the sectionals last season.

AFTER NARROWLY missing the sectionals last season, Aquinas coach Donna Paro is looking to get her team in the post-season this time around. The return of seniors Kacey Compisi at shortstop and Terri Seiler at first base should help, but Paro will need to get strong pitching from Sherri Arnell if the Little Irish are to get over the post-season hump.

Returning second baseman Kathy Thies should pick up where she left off last season. She led last year's team, which finished 4-11 overall, in hitting as a freshman.

Junior utility player Michele Cerra is also back for another season.

The young season has already been a roller

Continued on Page 9

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