

Cards stacked in Mooney's favor

By Richard A. Kiley
Staff writer

The more things change, the more they stay the same for the varsity girls' softball program at Cardinal Mooney High School. Despite a change in head coaches and a sizeable turnover in team personnel last spring, the Cards hardly missed a beat by reaching the Section 5 Class AA semifinals.

Mooney fell to Liz Helbig and Webster, 10-3, mainly because of some shabby fielding. Eight of Webster's 10 runs were unearned, and Helbig held the mighty Cardinal batters to just five hits.

Even with the loss of Noelle Feeney, who pitched Mooney to a sectional title in 1987, and an outstanding two-way outfielder in Julie Kolb (.439, 3 home runs, 30 RBIs), the Cards will once again be the prohibitive favorite to win the Private-Parochial League and look to be strong contenders to take it all in Class AA.

Mooney is one of seven diocesan high school girls' softball teams looking for berths in the sectionals this spring.

The make-up of this year's **Cardinal Mooney** team, which features eight seniors and as many juniors, has second-year head coach Paul Forte and his Cards feeling confident about returning to the sectional championship game for the fourth time in five years.

Even with the graduation of Feeney and Kolb, Mooney has a plethora of talent back. A familiar face to many Cardinal fans will take a not-so-familiar role this season. Senior Cheryl Lennox will be the team's No. 1 pitcher this spring, moving over from her customary shortstop position.

Lennox was 3-0 last year when she came on after Feeney went down with an injury.

"She (Lennox) has good speed, outstanding location, and she takes care of the middle with her fielding," Forte said of his team leader. "Noelle was faster, but Cheryl might have a little better location."

Lennox is also exceptional with her bat. As a junior, she led the team with a .515 batting average and 43 RBIs.

The catching position is in good hands with the return of senior Shannon Barry (.256).

Senior Margie McGuire will move from the outfield, where she played the last two years, to first base this season. Forte hopes the move will keep the valuable senior from aggravating a knee injury she suffered early last winter. The Mooney coach is also looking for McGuire, who had four hits in a scrimmage against Spencerport last weekend, to improve upon her .235 batting average last season.

Three other returning seniors from last year's 20-5 team — second baseman Dawn Pickering (.321, 18 RBIs), left fielder Liz

Furey and outfielder Julie Roman — will bolster the Cardinal attack, as will junior shortstop Gia Cucinelli (.468, 27 RBIs), outfielder/catcher Patti Heydens (.280) and third baseman Marisa Shackelford. Forte said both Pickering, who pitched for Forte on the JV two years ago, and Shackelford could also spell Lennox on the mound when necessary.

Junior outfielder Regina Browne, senior outfielder/infielder Michele Long and senior Michele Vandeweighe also return.

Four promising newcomers are juniors Michele Loewke, Kim Andolina, Chris Kluchko and Kelly Gaffney. Kluchko earned Player of the Week honors for her performance in three victorious scrimmages against Brockport, East Rochester and Spencerport.

Mooney, which will play seven games under the lights this season, was scheduled to open up the regular season against Marshall on Tuesday, April 11.

After beginning spring practices with only a handful of players last year, 10th-year Nazareth Academy coach Dave Pisano upset a few administrators earlier this spring when he announced that no softball players could try out for the school's spring musical.

Pisano and his players may be in a position to upset unsuspecting competition on the softball diamond this time around. Despite the loss of shortstop Amy Budd (.318), first baseman Samantha Schramm (.360) and center fielder Lesley Salladin (.270), the Nazareth coach is touting this year's softball team as "the most talented I've ever had."

Pisano has four key seniors returning with pitcher Nicole Olley (9-5 in '88), third baseman Kristen Mattie (starting her fourth year), second baseman Jackie Sojka (.410) and outfielder April Vella (.489).

According to Pisano, Olley worked on changing up her pitches in the off-season. The extra effort appears to have paid off: Olley struck out all nine batters she faced in a scrimmage against Marshall last week.

Junior catcher Melissa Creamer, who started as a sophomore, completes the battery.

Pisano will need production from several juniors who stood out on the JV last year. Center fielder Renee Gambitta, left fielder Julie Sojka, first baseman Rory Cottrel and utility player Amy Attridge have moved up to the varsity.

Two other players, senior Caitlin Culligan and junior Amy Farrell, should also make an impact. Culligan had two triples in the scrimmage against Marshall.

"If everything goes well, we should be real competitive," Pisano said. "I've had decent pitchers before, but I've never had the ball players that could back them up at every spot."

Second-year Bishop Kearney coach Dave Riesenberger lost his team's MVP, pitcher/shortstop Kelli Curcio, to graduation. He'll need production from seniors Sherri Bell, Carrie Caruso and Jill Newman to pick up the slack.

A fine class of juniors, including Kearney's pitcher Anne Stockslader, is also back. Stockslader just completed an outstanding bowling season.

Center fielder Kate Dillon returns for her second year on the varsity, as do second baseman and power hitter Wendy Isaacs and shortstop Sandy Supple.

Two reserves from last year's team, senior right fielder Heidi Kunsman and senior infielder Carol Missel, will play bigger roles this season. Sophomore pitcher Michelle Pinkney, the ace of the JV last year, will provide relief for Stockslader.

Riesenberger is hoping to finish on the upside of .500 this season, after last year's 7-10 campaign ended with a loss to Hornell in the first round of the Class A sectionals.

Kearney was scheduled to open up its season against Midlakes at home on Monday, April 10, before playing host to Mercy on April 12.

Mike Baxter, whose sister Jennifer pitched for Our Lady of Mercy last year, will take over the program from Paul Walker. Last season, Walker guided the Monarchs to a 12-6 season, which ended with a quarterfinal loss to Cardinal Mooney.

In addition to his sister, Baxter will be minus catcher Laura Wambach, third baseman Beth Hebert and shortstop Julie Buntich, who has opted to sit out the softball season after leading Mercy's basketball team to a sectional championship and a trip to the state high school basketball tournament.

Junior shortstop and co-captain Kim Caccamise will be the catalyst for the new Mercy coach, who is also counting on the team's other co-captain, senior Erin Baumer, for run production.

Three juniors who played on the JV last year — right fielder Theresa Cutter, left fielder Elizabeth Kowal and center fielder Kristin White — will make up a young outfield.

Besides Caccamise and Baumer, the rest of the infield has no varsity experience with junior third baseman Nicky Lebel and sophomore second baseman Peggy Riley.

Two sophomores, pitcher Mary Beth Cleary — another basketball standout — and catcher Stacey Selner, will look to get the job done as the Monarchs' battery. Selner played second base for the JV last year.

Another new coach, Carol Jones at Aquinas, is hoping to get her team in the sectionals for the first time in three years.

Although she lost shortstop Kacey



File Photo

Our Lady of Mercy will sorely miss Julie Buntich's fielding prowess this spring.

Compisi and first baseman Terri Seiler to graduation, Jones' pitching appears to be the cornerstone of the team with the return of seniors Sheri Arnell and Michele Cerra.

Cerra, who also plays first base, should be one of the team's better hitters this spring, along with senior outfielder Marguerite Zorn and junior infielder Kathy Thies. As a freshman, Thies led the team in hitting and posted impressive numbers once again last year.

Senior Jen Martins will anchor the outfield.

To come through this season, Jones is relying on many juniors, including infielder/outfielder Debbie Hofford, and even a freshman and a sophomore. Freshman infielder Amy Reynders has caught the eye of her new coach, as has sophomore Lynn Wesley, the primary pitcher for the JV team last spring.

Aquinas opens up its season against league-rival Mooney on Thursday, April 13. Among the non-league games for the Little Irish is the Eastridge tournament on May 20.

Pat Luzzi returns starting pitching for the first time in the three years he's been coaching at DeSales. Sophomore Danielle Boncaro is back for another season after pitching the Saints to a 12-6 record last season, which ended with a loss to Avoca in the Class D finals.

All Boncaro did as a freshman was compile a 10-4 record on the mound, lead the team in hitting with a .529 batting average (six doubles, three triples and a home run) and make the Finger Lakes West all star first team.

The return of Boncaro — along with Tara Bague, Tricia Long, Mary Kelly Sullivan and Mary Ellen Chilbert — is the main reason Luzzi is shaking off the losses

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Boxers take home awards from annual Mission Bouts

David Isabella won Fighter of the Night and Rich Lombardo earned the Outstanding Freshman Boxer Award at the 59th Annual Mission Bouts at Aquinas Institute Friday, March 10.

Lombardo defeated Peter Montagliano in the Featherweight bout. Other winners were: Dave Baldwin, Steve Donner, Brian Wade, Keith O'Connell, Sam DeSalvo, Sean Mahan, Dan Robinson, David Isabella, Joe LoMedico and Don Schwab.

Mahan's win over Mike Anthony was voted the Fight of the Night.

CYO to distribute awards

The Catholic Youth Organization will distribute Faith Through Sports Awards Sunday, April 16. The program begins at 7 p.m. at St. Joseph's Church, 940 Ridge Rd. E., Rochester.

The award recognizes athletes in CYO basketball, softball and cheerleading who "live their faith both on and off the court," according to the organization's office. Call 716/454-2030 for information.

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The winner was Lisa Bartle of Greece.

SPORTS TRIVIA

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Which base coach usually gives the signals to a batter?

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Each week, the Catholic Courier, in conjunction with Locker Room Sports will feature a Sports Trivia contest. All you have to do to enter is answer the question, fill in your name and address and the school you attend (if applicable), cut out the coupon and send it in to the Catholic Courier. If more than one correct entry is received, a drawing will be held and one winning entry will be drawn.

If yours is the winning entry, you will be mailed a certificate redeemable for \$10.00 OFF any purchase of \$25.00 or more at Locker Room Sports, 560 W. Ridge Rd.

All entries must be received within seven days of this paper's issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

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