

Young Cougars aim for winning record

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Second in a series of preseason Metro softball stories. Next: Linn-Mar.)

The Kennedy softball team is young again this season, but not as young as it was last year.

The Cougars are coming off a rebuilding season in which they went 9-22. The team lost just three seniors from that team, which had seven freshmen and three eighth graders on it.

"We are a really young team, but we are developing and we are getting better and communicating," said Kennedy's lone senior, pitcher Kassi Nunnikhoven. "We are learning a lot from each other and helping each other out."

The Cougars are excited to see what they can do coming into this season, now that the team has some experience under its belt. The Cougars return both of their starting pitchers from last season in Nunnikhoven and sophomore Taylor Sohn. Nunnikhoven was 3-16 with a 2.97 ERA and Sohn 4-9 with a 4.65 ERA.

Kennedy is also excited to be bringing back a core of young hitters that lead the team offensively last season, led by junior infielder Amanda Gaffey who hit .402 with three home runs and 19 RBIs.

"They have already set the bar for themselves," said Coach Katie Bova. "I think they will have to live up to that bar, or exceed it. They are going to have to push each other and challenge each other because this is a good group of girls. They are pretty talented."

Kennedy is hoping that the off-season work that they have put in will help the players cultivate that talent, and they are already starting to see some results.

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“The younger players only get stronger every year, and they have many more years to go so we will only have a stronger team,” Gaffey said.

The team is excited to see just how much stronger they will be this season. The goal is a winning record.

“We are an extra step ahead of where we were last year, which I think is good,” Bova said. “I hope that with that extra step we can get off to a good start this year.”

Kennedy opens its season Tuesday, May 24, with a doubleheader against Waterloo East.