

Outlaws coach can't wait for 2017

By Tom Mauldin
Correspondent

Sisters High School softball Coach Dave Smith says the Outlaws softball program is alive and well, and that plans for the 2017 season are underway.

In a season that almost wasn't due to a lack of players, the Outlaws got a late start and won just two of 18 games. But the energy level and growth of the youthful team led to steady improvement during the course of the season.

"Looking back at the season, I noticed a lot of growth with the team, especially with the freshmen," said Smith. "I had girls in the first week who had a hard time hitting the ball off of a T, and by the end of the season they were putting the ball into play."

This year's Outlaws varsity consisted of 14 players, including seven freshmen. But only one week prior to the season opener, the Outlaws had only eight players. It took a last-minute recruiting effort by Smith and those eight to make the season happen.

As a result, the Outlaws did not have a complete team practice prior the start of pre-league games. They finished 2-13 in the Sky-Em League, recording a pair of wins over Cottage Grove, 19-9 and 24-14.

During the first two rounds of league action, they struggled against Elmira,

Junction City and Sutherlin, but scored in each of their final three games.

"I can't wait for next year," said Smith, who noted that 2016 had a big learning curve.

"I am looking forward to next year's team," said Smith, a former college football player. "This year was a wild ride at the beginning with all types of challenges from (lack of) numbers, injuries to running practices by myself to not knowing how many kids were going to show up during the first two weeks with spring break."

“ These girls in the program and the ones coming up are motivated... ”
—Coach Dave Smith

Several of the Outlaws had not played softball previously.

"The one thing the girls are lacking and to no fault of theirs, is the experience of playing on a summer league," said Smith. "That's where they really develop their skills and begin to understand the game better. Or by going to different camps and working on their skills."

Despite their lack of experience, the Outlaws were long on effort.

"The one thing that stood out the most was the heart and determination in these girls to

not give up," said their coach.

Smith said he had a number of players who want to continue practicing during the summer. He said he plans on having pitching, hitting and fielding camps as often as possible.

Smith said, "These girls in the program and the ones coming up are motivated and willing to put in the hard work. And that's why I am willing to go the extra mile with them and work with them any chance they have. They know they can call me or the other coaches any time to work on skills."

Smith was assisted by Harley Rowe and McKibben Womack. Those two, along with his returning players, are already recruiting for 2017. The Outlaws graduated three seniors (Leah McIntosh, Zoe Nason and Marie Coffee), and junior Shauna Ferrell is moving to Washington.

But lack of players shouldn't be an issue in 2017.

Key players returning will be All-League pitcher Amanda Smith, Kyle Steiner, Savana Ryan, Sophia Affatati, Grace Maiden, Sarah Hartford, Nancy Montecinos, Beth Anne Yount, Haley Magleic and Kennedy Smith.

Coach Smith, who was hired a short time prior to the start of practice in late February, said he wishes he had a enough players to form a summer team. Only his daughter, Amanda, plays

summer travel ball.

"I asked the girls who would want to participate in summer ball and I had a showing of about seven girls, so we were a few short," said Smith. "More of them wanted to play, but they had committed to summertime jobs."

Smith hopes to get his players involved with Fastpitch Northwest, an organization that conducts Player Evaluation Camps (PEC) and a College Exposure Tournament in Washington in late July. Sisters High School will host a Fastpitch Northwest PEC on June 20.

"If I could get my girls on the team to go to an event like this, it would change the whole dynamic of our team and our program at Sisters High," said Smith. "The level of talent at these events makes the girls push themselves beyond what they think they can do, and the best things is the level of sportsmanship

and how many new friends they meet. How often can a young person say they played on a team with girls from Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Hawaii, Canada, Washington and Oregon?"

He added that a lot of people are working hard at the youth level and that the numbers are increasing, but that coaching consistency is needed. The Outlaws had the same head coach from 2007-2010 when the team was Sky-Em co-champions. But since, they have had four different head coaches.

"The one thing our program is lacking is consistency with coaching, and the only ones that are hurt by that are the kids," he said. "I would like to develop a program where my staff and players are helping out at the middle school level. I want good communication with the coaches there and that we are here to help in any way."

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