

Siuslaw from 1B

only has two seniors with any varsity level experience — from two seasons ago.

“We’re just trying to build around that,” O’Mara explained. “We’re trying to get more girls out, which is hard to do in this situation where we don’t have the kids all in school every day. So, our numbers are kind of in that in-between zone in terms of whether or not there will be two teams [JV and varsity]. It’s just trying to do the best you can with what you’ve got and coaching the girls that show up.”

The two players returning with varsity experience are junior Bailey Overton, who plays shortstop, and senior Lizbeth Garcia-Galvan, who plays second base. Aside from those two positions, O’Mara says things are still very much in the air.

“We’re still evaluating, trying to decide,” he said. “We’re evaluating all the players and their positions and moving them around — and I’m assuming that, right up until Monday’s practice next week, we’ll still be trying to make some solid decisions on who will be a starter, who’s more of a substitute and who might not really see any game time in the first game.”

“There are still a lot of decisions to be made.”

The issues a coach would normally face in the pre-season have been amplified by the lack of time coaches have to get ready for that first game.

“It’s a very, very fast turnaround,” admitted O’Mara, “but everybody’s in the same boat with that. We have such a wide variety of experience — including no experience at all — and trying to deal with that in six practices and get ready for our first game. So, it’s going well, but there’s a lot of work to do.”

Another issue O’Mara is facing is that some of his players are still participating in this final week of Season Two [fall] sports, so they haven’t been able to make practice this last week. These players will only have Monday to get prepared with their team for their first game, which takes place Tuesday.

“We have some softball players that are cheerleaders,” said O’Mara, “and they’ve still got a game on Friday night to cheer at. So, there’s a little bit of overlap for the sharing of the athletes going on this week, and after that the numbers should somewhat stabilize.”

The first day of practice, O’Mara had 15 players show. Thursday, that number increased to 18. “So, it’s getting better in terms of numbers,” he said.

It will be a quick start but, fortunately, as long as weather allows, the team will get to compete in the same number of league games as they would in a normal school year.

“We really have not lost any league games,” said O’Mara. “The state set a limit on the number of games we could play with COVID, and it just happened to be the exact number that we would normally play in league.”

But what is different is that there are no non-league “tune-up” games prior to taking on Sky-Em League opponents.

“That’s when we try to work out all the kinks,” said O’Mara. “So, we lost those. But in terms of league play, we’re going to see everybody — weather



Sean O’Mara watches the team practices running from third base to home plate in a drill designed to teach situational awareness around the diamond.

permitting — when we would normally see them.”

Although O’Mara is looking forward to competitions, this season his focus is more on the whole player than on the big win.

“I think that some of the goals we are starting to talk about for the season definitely deal more with our skill development, our attitude and our effort that we can bring to practice every day,” said O’Mara. “So, we’re trying to focus on the things that will make us be more responsible, have better self-discipline, overcome adversity and, at least at the beginning, we’re trying not to be focusing so much on that big game moment — that win or that loss.”

Long-term, O’Mara feels that this approach will

bring more meaningful improvement to his players.

“We’re focused on improving ourselves, meeting each individual where they are, and saying, ‘Okay, now how do we get you to be better with whatever skill you need, and be better with your mental approach to adversity, challenge and those kinds of things,’” O’Mara explained. “And those things aren’t necessarily new in my program, but they’re magnified this year due to the lack of time we have with them and the quick turnaround.”

With this season playing out the way it will, the coaches have a short time to work with their players and begin to build back some of the momentum

lost from their programs in the past year. Building back this foundation now is vital to programs returning to normalcy next school year.

“We want them to come back,” said O’Mara. “We want them to have a great experience so that they will want to come back out next year when things are hopefully more normalized.”

“If we do end up falling short of numbers for two teams [this year], by them having a good experience, that word spreads. And pretty soon you’re in good shape; you’re at that 24 number or so when you can easily have two teams and keep continuing to develop even more, and just keep the ball rolling.”

If O’Mara can reset the stage during this shortened six-week season, the Lady

Vikings have a lot to look forward to next spring and seasons to come.

One advantage O’Mara does have this year is that he is one of the only returning coaches in the league.

“I don’t know about Junction City,” he explained, “but all the rest of [the teams in the league] have a new coach; I may be the only returning coach in the league.”

According to O’Mara, this season will be telling as far as learning each school’s new coaching style.

“You never really know what you’re going up against coaching-wise when you’ve got new coaches until you get out there and play them and see what their mentality is about the game,” he said. “Are they short gamers or are they long bombers? Are they wanting to run different kinds of strategies

that you don’t normally see, or are they more standardized softball? In that way, it will be a very interesting season as everybody’s trying to get a read on what everybody else does and how they operate to see if they can counter it.”

Overall, there are simply a lot of unknowns with this coming season. But O’Mara and the Lady Vikings will take it one day at a time and, for now, he is finding the positive — including being grateful for what they *do* have, such as time on the field.

“The weather’s been pretty cooperative, so it’s been nice to be outside again,” said O’Mara.

Siuslaw’s first softball game this season will be away at Cottage Grove on Tuesday at 5 p.m., followed by a doubleheader at home next Friday with Elmira, at 3 and 5 p.m.

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