

Defenders will be without amazing '13 class

The Daily Item

By Jon Gerardi

It's going to take some time for area fans to get used to the new Warrior Run lineup, especially in the circle.

After four years of seeing all-state pitcher and three-time Daily Item Player of the Year Tay Parker blow past competitors seemingly on a daily basis, the all-time strikeout queen for the Defenders is gone.

Parker is one of five Warrior Run players to graduate, a quintet that accounted for 175 hits last year alone.

"That group of seniors, they were a special group of girls. They gave a lot to our program." Warrior Run coach Garth Watson said. "Always tough to replace them. (I'm) very impressed with our freshman class. We have 10 freshman and they have a lot to offer this team."

The Defenders will have two sophomores splitting time in the circle in Mikayla Griner and Jackie Vognetz.

Warrior Run does return three players from last year's team in seniors Laura Bastian, Carra Rishel and Lynn Vermilya.

"Carra does a good job at short and Laura Bastian is phenomenal at second base. She's tough," Watson said.

"Lynn's got a great arm. She's done a very, very good job handling Tay and she does very well behind the plate."

Much like the Defenders, Southern Columbia has a task to replace some key players as well. The Tigers lose all-state pitcher Mallory Tomaschik and all-state shortstop Kirstin Blass, two talented players who helped Southern reach the PIAA Class A final two years ago.

"I expect Abbey Herr to fit right in. I think she'll do a good job for us. She's a decent hitter (too)," Southern Columbia coach Al Cihocki said.

Herr, a sophomore, will replace Tomaschik in the circle. Southern Columbia also has five players returning, including sophomore Blair Johnston, who played terrific last season as a freshman behind the plate.

Loyalsock has a huge hole to fill as well in Amanda Daneker, an all-state catcher now excelling at Coastal Carolina who rarely let anyone steal on the Lancers.

While catcher will without a doubt be the Lancers' biggest question mark, Loyalsock returns sophomore Kayla Gee to pitch and Alexandria Pagana at shortstop, in addition to Ally Kennedy in center field.

The Lancers also have a new coach in Craig Weaver Sr., who replaces Tom O'Malley after just one season. O'Malley—who was a former professional baseball player—returned to Japan for a job with his former team.

One team that perhaps is a favorite to take the Heartland Athletic Conference Division II title this year will be Central Columbia. The Blue Jays have eight returners back, including junior pitcher Paige Seigris and a talented infield group.

The only player Central Columbia graduated was one of its outfielders.

Now entering his 45th year as Central Columbia's coach, Duane Ford is approaching career win No. 750, but he attributes that not as a personal feat, but as a team and program accomplishment.

"I've been here virtually from the beginning of Central softball, but my wins are really theirs, and great players—

Lewisburg has had some tough seasons of late—going 0-39 the past two years—but the *Green Dragons* have eight players coming back with experience and first-year coach Devin Crebs feels that will only help her squad out.

“Their attitude and work ethic is quickly becoming contagious to the new girls. The high number of new girls that we’ve received makes each player work harder for their position, and ultimately this is what’s going to make the Lewisburg softball program successful,” Crebs said.

Some of those key returners include center fielder and pitcher Tiffany Bardole, catcher Rita Benfer and short-stop Kirsten Blakeslee.

Hughesville has a new coach in Shannon English, who inherits a Spartans squad with three returning seniors. Hughesville went 4-16 last year.

Montoursville has three seniors back who will try to improve on a 4-16 campaign.