

Hawks heat up with veteran diamond talent

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Returning letterwinners brighten Grafton's forecast for a conference title shot

If a Wisconsin softball team can't beat winter, it might as well try playing somewhere else a bit warmer — like Alabama.



The Grafton High School squad is scheduled to open this season Tuesday, March 26, with a 4:30 p.m. home game against Cedarburg, but that contest is expected to be postponed due to a snow-covered field.

If so, the Black Hawks will begin play on a spring-break trip to Foley, Ala. Combining vacation fun with practice, they will face Foley and a team from Kentucky in nonconference games April 3.

"It should be interesting. We don't know anything about those teams, but at least it gives us a chance to play," Grafton coach Ken Hunt said.

When it rounds into shape, Grafton should have one of the North Shore Conference's top clubs. With seven letterwinners back, including most of their starters, the Hawks have proven pitching, hitting and defensive skills.

In a league dominated by perennial powers such as defending champion Germantown and runner-up Homestead, Grafton aims to improve on an 8-6, third-place record.

The Hawks' veterans include seniors Lauren Lennon (center field), Taylor Thiede (second base) and Sarah Fischer (catcher); juniors Amanda Hunt (pitcher), Emmy Kabitzke (infield/pitcher) and Sam Maglio (outfield); and sophomore Kate Lennon (utility).

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Lauren Lennon earned All-NSC first-team honors last season, when she batted .463 with a .732 slugging average. The spark of a theft-minded offense, she led the league with 21 stolen bases.

Further bolstering a Grafton lineup that hit .346 last year were Hunt (.469), Kabitzke (.366), Fischer (.353), Thiede (.333) and Kate Lennon (.276). The latter four all received honorable mention in all-conference voting.

Hunt earned all-conference second-team honors as a pitcher. She had a 4-5 record and 3.33 earned-run average in NSC play, striking 63 in 65 innings.

Kabitzke solidified the pitching staff with a 4-1 record and 2.26 ERA, striking out 20 in 31 innings.

"We should be solid up the middle with our pitching, Thiede at second base and (Lauren) Lennon in center field," coach Hunt said.

"With this many players back, I think we have a chance to be better than last year."

Off-season work should help the Hawks. Six of their seven letterwinners played on the same U-16 softball team last summer, their coach said.

Grafton's varsity roster will also include players such as juniors Katrina Schmidt (infield) and Jackie Corner (infield), sophomore Sarah Dieringer (outfield) and freshmen Katie Hunt (utility) and Morgan Weisflog (first base/outfield).

Schmidt will be sidelined early in the season as she recovers from an injury.

Coach Hunt expects a familiar chase for the conference title this season, with Germantown and Homestead as the favorites.

"It's still everyone else trying to catch them," he said. "Hopefully, we will be there, too."

Following spring break, Grafton is scheduled to take on the league's best in consecutive 4:30 p.m. games. The Hawks will play at Germantown on April 9 and host Homestead on April 11.

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Image Information: SENIOR CATCHER Sarah Fischer is one of the top returning players on the Grafton softball team this season. Photo by Sam Arendt