

sports

AU softball: Expecting greatness in 2019 season

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After feeling out the water last year with new head coach Emlyn Knerem, the Ashland University softball team is ready to crack down and give the 2019 season their all.

“Our motto this year is to expect greatness,” junior infielder Camille Pollutro said. “We need to go in to each game expecting to take two and avoid complacency.”

Last year, Pollutro had a breakout season as a sophomore, achieving a .390 batting average, 33 runs, and a .968 fielding percentage.

“She’s one of those girls who’s an all around athlete, she goes out there and plays hard,” Knerem said.

Knerem, now in her second year coaching at AU, expects to have a successful season and further grow as a team. Knerem was hired in 2017 and succeeded Sheila Gulasko who coached the Eagles from 1997-2017.

In her first year, Knerem secured a 23-25 record for the Eagles and led them to substantial wins such as their 2-0 win over Grand Valley State University on April 21, 2018.

“We came in there, knocked two home runs out. Laney Jones pitched a phenomenal game, we

were one of their two losses they had in-conference last year,” Knerem said. “That shows how good of a team they were and we ended up on top.”

The Eagles were eliminated from the GLIAC Tournament on May 4 after losing to No. 3 seed Saginaw Valley State (10-6) and then subsequently, No.7 seed Northwood (9-7).

“We had our backs against the wall and I thought we did a really great job being patient, finding holes and getting runners in to make a game out of it,” Knerem said.

Knerem explained that the largest hurdle of last year was settling into a new team dynamic.

“One of the big ones was just getting to know each other. They were trying to get to know my coaching style and I was still settling in as a first year head coach,” Knerem said. “Last season started slow because of that and I want a stronger start this season. We want to stress the importance of every single game this time around and hopefully we’ll sit above that .500 mark.”

Senior first baseman Kylie Asmus has a similar mindset to that of Knerem.

“I view last year as a learning experience; we had some downfalls



AU ATHLETICS

An AU pitcher winds up in a contest in the 2018 season.

and the weather didn’t help,” Asmus said. “We’ve used last year to our advantage though and adjusted, and we are striving for better this year.”

Asmus had a similarly successful season last year. As a junior she scored 28 runs, 246 putouts, and a .362 batting average. Asmus is one of nine seniors on the team this year, a stark contrast to last season with pitcher Paige McMenemy and catcher Sadie Cunningham being the only two seniors.

“We have nine seniors so essentially we’re bringing back all of our starters with the exception of McMenemy,” said Knerem. “We’ll see our three pitchers this year get a lot more time all around.”

Although the team lost McMenemy and Cunningham, Knerem is confident that the new upperclassman will fulfill lost roles.

“We have a very strong lineup coming back, getting [now] upperclassman like junior Dayna Denner back in the lineup will be great for us, adding another powerbat to the list. The goal is to keep our core strong,” Knerem said.

Along with Knerem’s coaching abilities, Erin Pond was hired as assistant coach in July, 2018.

“Pitching and defense has always been more of my forte,” Knerem said. “I purposefully looked for someone who could teach batting and take over the offense, and Erin came here and just ran with it. I think she’ll definitely help a

lot with our teams growth offensively.”

Pond has adopted a new offensive philosophy that she is teaching to the players. Essentially the goal is to put pressure on the defence and focus on hitting ground balls and working up to line drives.

“She stresses putting the ball into play hard and working ground up,” said Asmus.

The AU softball team officially kicks off its season on Feb. 22 when they play at the Sixth Annual Lewis Dome Invitational Softball Tournament. Over the course of two days, they will play Lewis University, William Jewell, Missouri S&T, and Lindenwood University.

The Eagles’ GLIAC schedule will

commence on March 20 at 3 p.m. at Brookside Park in a doubleheader vs. Northwood. They have been chosen to finish fourth in the 2019 GLIAC preseason poll, which was released on Feb. 7. In 2018, Ashland tied for fifth in the conference standings.

“We need to keep our pitchers fresh and strong, and make sure that everyone is ready for a challenge,” said Knerem. “Our conference is tough, it’s pretty much like a dogfight everytime we take the field. There were a lot of splits last year and a lot of back and forth so we need to walk in to every single game with confidence.”



AU ATHLETICS

AU head coach Emlyn Knerem coaches her players from third base.



AU ATHLETICS

Senior Paige Summers steps up to the plate in a game last season.

Grapplers look to make their mark in postseason

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The Ashland University wrestling team is winding down their season and have their sights set on the bigger meets to make the most of their 2018-2019 year.

The eagles had a successful finish last year, placing fifth as a team at the Division II National Championships. They ended with two national champions, current alumni Luke Cramer in the 197-pound weight class and current redshirt junior Bret Romanzak in the 165-pound weight class.

“We had a lot of upperclassmen on that team,” head wrestling coach Josh Hutchens said. “Coming back this year we only had three of our starters, so we have a few new guys in the line up.”

After having time to reflect on their success of last season and putting in work on their own time this summer, the Eagles geared up to have another great season.

Seven Eagles are now ranked regionally, including redshirt freshman Bryce Davis, freshman Luke Wymer, redshirt junior Chandler Minnard, sophomore Carson Speelman, redshirt junior Bret Romanzak, redshirt junior Christian Price and redshirt sophomore Tristen Weirich.

Three of those men including, Romanzak, Minnard and Weirich are now also ranked in the nation.

Among all of the wrestler for AU, Weirich is the highest ranked at number seven at 285.

“We’ve had a couple of true freshmen step in,” Hutchens said as he acknowledges Wymer at 133 and Daniel Beemer at 184 who have started out strong and are looking for strong finishes at regionals.

“These guys wrestle every day with those guys [who were national qualifiers], they know ‘wow that guy can do it,’” Hutchens said. “If I keep working that could be an

achievable goal for me,’ whether that be short term like this year or whether that be long term, they can do it.”

While Hutchens realizes that he has had a young team this year, but he and the upperclassman have realized that the freshman have done well in filling their roles.

“As a team, I have been fairly impressed with our freshmen and the way they have stepped into their role and filled missing spots in our line up,” Price said. “Especially

from our younger guys and first year guys, they’re going out there and working their butts off.”

Hutchens explains that the team is lacking the consistency of last year but they are still working hard and striving for that key factor as they get closer to regionals.

“All of us have targets on our back, guys go into the matches really prepared for us and know what we do, they know how to stop certain things and that makes it fairly difficult,” one of the team captains

Price said. “I believe the majority of our team realizes that but we all expect to go out there and do our best and give it 100 percent.”

AU finished up their last dual of the season on Feb. 8 against nationally ranked (No. 21) Lake Erie College with a decision of 28-13.

The Eagles wrestled for the last time before regionals at the John Carroll Open in Cleveland, Ohio on Feb. 10 where AU’s redshirt sophomore Eric Fasnacht won at 165 pounds.

“These men really have helped me try and achieve my best and we push each other,” Price said. “We all know each other’s goals and we keep those in mind and we just try to go out there and be great every day.”

With only big meets left, the men are narrowing in to make it to the next level.

“The big thing for us is that we have a really tough regional this year being a young team,” Hutchens said. “They take three out of regionals to nationals and most of our team is ranked outside of our top three so it will be exceeding those expectations and making it to nationals.”

Next up for the Eagles will be the NCAA Division II Super Regional, taking place at 10 a.m. on Feb. 23 at West Liberty, W.Va.



JUSTIN DAVIS

AU grappler Bret Romanzak wrestles in a match against Notre Dame College in January.