

Coach Campbell, ex-UAB star, brings enthusiasm to Murphy girls

BY TOMMY HICKS
tommyhicks@thecallnews.com

Lannah Campbell enters her first season as head coach of the Murphy softball team with enthusiasm, and it is contagious with her young team. Campbell said she has been pleased with the approach the Panthers are taking to the things she wants to accomplish this season and the approach the team will take in a difficult Class 7A area.

It's also true that Murphy's recent teams have struggled. The Panthers won just two games last season and only six games overall in the 2017 season.

And that's why the enthusiasm with which the Panthers are approaching early workouts will be counted on by Campbell. It can take some time to turn things around.

"I'm really excited," said Campbell, who was a standout pitcher at UAB during her college career. "They are buying in to what I'm wanting to do. Sometimes that's hard with a first-year coach. But the thing I really want them to do is compete and I think they're really buying into that. We had a competition (recently) and seeing them fired up and ready to go was great. If we have that this year we'll be fine."

Asked the strengths of this team, Campbell said, "There's not really one strength that jumps out to me. I think we'll be pretty dadgum scrappy. We're hopefully going to run the bases well and our catcher (Ashton Farnell) is going to be a big leader for us so I'll lean on her every chance I get."



Lannah Campbell

Farnell is among the most experienced players on the roster, which will include experienced players and those just coming into the program.

Another player who Campbell will count on this season is pitcher Brittany Peal.

"Hopefully I can see some improvement on the mound," Campbell said. "I think my pitcher Brittany Peal is really going to step up this year."

And Campbell says to look out for infielder Kaitlyn Dycus. "I've got another scrappy player, Kaitlyn Dycus, that's a fireball for us. You'll know when she's there for sure," Campbell said.

The key as the season gets under way is to get the players on the field and see what they can do.

"I'm ready to get on the field and get some full practices in and see what they've got," Campbell said. "I haven't really seen them full out yet, but they are buying in and they're 100 percent fully committed to what we're trying to do. I'm just ready to get going."

Panthers look to five senior leaders

BY MARK R. KENT
mkent@thecallnews.com

MOBILE — A team with five seniors and head coach Blake Westbrook will lead the Murphy Panthers baseball program to what it hopes will be an improvement on the 7-19 season the team posted in 2018.

The Panthers finished out of playoff consideration with a 2-6 record in an area that includes McGill-Toolen, Fairhope and Foley. The two area wins the Panthers were able to log last year were one apiece against Foley and McGill.

The 2019 roster for Murphy shows three senior pitchers in Steven Oates, Adam Grant and D'Andre Bailey. Infielder Donald Hillery and outfielder Jordan Powe make up the senior position players on the Panthers' roster.

There are also five juniors listed on the Panthers' roster. They are pitcher Jaedon Hillery, infielders Dewayne Wheat, Matthew Toland and Matthew Allsup and outfielder Tremaine Wheat.

There are also seven underclassmen who will compete for field time this season. Sophomores Blake Hayes, William Robinson, Ashton Moore, Breyden Thomas, Jay Massey and Napoleon Colston join the only freshman listed, Tyler Thornton, to round out the preseason roster.

Against fellow Class 7A opponents, all of them from Mobile and Baldwin counties, the Panthers were 2-10 last season.

The Panthers have not been in the AHSAA baseball playoffs since the 2014 season, when Class 6A was the

largest classification. In that season, the Panthers went 12-14 overall and lost a one-game playoff opening round game 2-0 to Alma Bryant. It was also the last time the Panthers had a winning area record, when they went 5-3.

That season saw the Panthers win its area series against McGill and Blount on the way to making the playoffs.

Since that season, Murphy has won a total of 29 games from 2015 to 2018, with no more than eight wins in any of those seasons. The Panthers won 12 games in their last playoff season in 2014.

The Panthers will open the 2019 baseball season on the road Feb. 18 against Alma Bryant.