

Youthful softball squad must grow up fast for St. Paul's

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MOBILE — What's that old line coaches use to describe young players? The best thing about freshmen is they become sophomores?

Coach Gerry Strang knows it well.

As a matter of fact, the veteran St. Paul's softball coach probably has it up on a wall in his office.

"You just hope that the new ones can fit in," Strang said, lamenting the fact his Lady Saints will be counting on some very young players for success this season. "We've got some good young talent coming up and we'll only have two seniors, four juniors, and everybody else is sophomore and below.

"We've got some very good younger players that actually stepped up last year, and by the end of the year we had three seventh-graders that were starting on the varsity," he said.

Despite the dearth of senior leadership, the kitchen shelves aren't completely empty of talent for Strang.

Those youngsters stepped up mightily as the season went on last year, finishing second in their area and ending the year 15-14.

And, again this time, some even younger folks will have to step up.

"We have a new JV team and it's the first time we've had a JV team in about 10 years," said Strang. "So we'll be bringing some of the younger ones up to the varsity."

Those newbies will join the likes of seniors Allie Anderson (infielder-outfielder) and Megan Minshew (pitcher), who returns after taking two years off.

Those youngsters will have to learn quickly, though, what with Satsuma, who Strang says is "always good," moving into the Saints' area this season.

St. Paul's also has some 6A and 7A teams on its schedule this season.

"It's exciting because of the younger players maturing a lot quicker than I thought. We've got 400 kids in the high school and we'll be competing against



Emma Penn is just an eighth-grader, but she is already a valuable veteran presence as the St. Paul's catcher.

teams with 2,000 in the school. But the better competition we can play, the better for us."

Other players Strang will be looking to as anchors this season are junior shortstop Taylor Nicks, eighth-grade pitcher Caroline McLendon, seventh-grade pitcher Madelin Howard and eighth-grade catcher Emma Penn, who actually was a big part of last year's team as a middle-schooler.

For Strang, who has been either a coach or administrator at St. Paul's for the past 43 years, the plan for 2019 is simple.

"We're just trying to improve a little bit every year."



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