

# Patterson, LDHS baseball aim high in new season

By Nick Herman  
Sports Editor

The Laurens Raiders' baseball team is ready for the start of the 2019 season, and head coach Tori Patterson hopes this year's team can finally be the one to break through and go beyond the opening round of the state playoffs.

Patterson, a former player with the Raiders, is trying to help change a trend that has existed for years where the Raiders posts good regular season and reaches the district final, only to see their Upper State hopes go up in smoke. He is optimistic that this

year's team can be the one to make that change.

"I can see this team being that team, they work really hard. If we do the little things we'll be fine," Patterson said. "In the past, for whatever reason, we just can't get out of that first round. It's hard to explain."

The Raiders have been practicing for about a month and had a few scrimmages to boot, giving Patterson and the coaches an idea of where things stand. Right now, the pitching and defense are off to good starts, while the offense is slightly behind, but Patterson is not worried about it at this point.

The pitching staff is led by Nicholas Robertson, Heath Bragg and Tanner Smith. The three seniors all pitched well in the offseason, and Patterson will count on all three to help lead the way. Robertson can throw three-to-four good pitches, Patterson said, and the hard-throwing right-hander pitched in almost every game last season. Bragg also pitched against region com-

petition, so he is familiar with conference hitters and is effective at inducing opposing batters into hitting ground balls.

Smith pitched some last season but has been a surprise entering this year because of the work he did in the weight room, helping to improve both his breaking ball and fastball.

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Submitted Photo

**SENIOR CLASS** — The Laurens Raiders' softball team hopes its four seniors are able to help lead the squad back to the top of the region with new head coach Michaela Smith.

## Smith back as Raiders prepare for campaign

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Sports Editor

We all know about the five-second rule. Laurens' new head softball coach Michaela Smith has a different rule - the three-second rule - and she wants to make sure her players follow it exactly as they start regular-season play.

"You messed up? You struck out? Whatever you've done, you've got three seconds," Smith said. "You can turn around, get mad, get sad, get glad, take a deep breath, turn back around, and let it go."

The Raiders welcome back Smith, the former player under Butch Clark who helped the team win back-to-back region titles, as she takes over the full-time coaching duties. She takes over for Haley Register, who was the coach for just one season. Smith acknowledged it is starting to sink in that she's back as head coach, but said it will really sink in when the Raiders play their first home game.

"It's a good feeling to be back home, be with the girls, and share with them what my love and passion for the program are - and what my commitment has been," she said.

Smith has been impressed with the team's work in the weight room. She said the players have made great strides since the first day, getting them to put in the work. In some instances the players' work is more than they did last season, but there is a reason behind her wanting the players to do more. The goal is to be better than last year, and to have the players realize they can do it.

The pitching staff will be led by senior Rachel Delio, the clear No. 1 hurler who looked strong in two recent scrimmages and pitched well enough to win both games. Delio's rise ball is looking good, as is her drop ball, and the change-up was looking better. The three pitches make for a good repertoire that Delio can go to.

"She's got a good arsenal that we're working with, and she's doing pretty good, being consistent, doing what we ask her to do," Smith said.

Eighth-grader Alyssa Rowe could see time in relief after having thrown in JV ball last year. Despite some early nerves, Rowe is working to get past it and should be a good contributor this year.

The combination of Rowe and Delio give Smith options when it comes to who faces who in certain games, and in certain situations. Clark, and Register, both would alternate pitchers for every other opposing hitter. Coach Smith may continue the trend this season, something that she saw Clark do when he coached travel ball when he'd switch catchers.

"It's not a bad distraction technique," Smith said. "It's actually a pretty good one to throw the batters off."

Kauree Munyan is likely to play at the catcher spot, and has been a surprise as an eighth-grader. She has a solid arm and should be a challenging target to try and steal bases against. Cassidy Plaia is likely to play at short with Vanessa Harshaw at second, and centerfielder Michaela Smith, who shares her name with her new head coach, backing the middle infielders up. But Coach Smith made it clear things are not set in stone, and the players should not assume they have a set spot.

"If you ever think you've got a set spot on the softball field you're sadly mistaken," Coach Smith said. "You never know what will happen, when that time will come that you get called on to do something you've never done before."

Laurens' offense is keyed by Plaia, Octavia Johnson, Munyan,

Delia and centerfielder Michaela Smith. Plaia is expected to be the lead-off hitter with her ability to put the ball in play and find gaps in the defense. Johnson, Munyan and Delio are expected to provide pop in the lineup, while Smith has done well putting the ball in play and moving runners over.

The region race should be competitive again, with J.L. Mann and perennial region threat Easley at the top of the standings. Coach Smith has set the bar at first place this year, not wanting her players to shoot for anything less. She was told growing up that you should shoot for the stars and, even if you fail, you might land on the moon.

All Coach Smith hopes for is her team to plant its flag atop the region standings, and hopefully re-establish Laurens as the region's team to beat.

**Roster:** Alyssa Cunningham, Alyssa Rowe, Bre Posey, Callie Wzorek, Cassidy Plaia, Kauree Munyan, Michaela Smith, Madison Davis, Madison Wilson, Octavia Johnson, Rachel Delio, Taylor Hudson, Trinity Daniels, Trinity Morris, Vanessa Harshaw.

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Retirement has been a topic of discussion around our dinner table for several years, and the fact that we are a "family of four" business made those conversations even more difficult. With that being said, we will be retiring hopefully by the end of the year, and our son and daughter-in-law will take on new careers.

**Red Rose Finance Co.** will continue to operate as normal, but it will only be accepting car payments on existing loans, and not making any new loans. **Affordable Rental Cars** will operate normally for the next several months.

We anticipate that Baldwin Automotive's "LAST DAY OF BUSINESS" will be in the next 30 to 60 days subject to staffing in our shop, customer activity and clearing out our remaining vehicle inventory. Our vehicle inventory will be priced close to wholesale and, in some cases, below wholesale. We'd much rather see local folks wind up getting a great deal instead of selling these vehicles at auction.

In closing, we want to say **THANK YOU** to all of you who have supported our company over the years. We will be staying in Laurens with no intention of moving anywhere else. Laurens is our home and we love it here. Please come take advantage of some **great pricing** on our certified near-new vehicles.

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