

MGM: Vikings put focus on cutting down walks, errors

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That equates to 30 years of coaching baseball, 23 of them in the high school ranks. He said he hopes his coaching experience will help MGM, which graduated a lot of seniors from last year's team. This year's group also has a large number of seniors —11— but they don't have a lot of game experience. Yet if the early workouts are any indication, the Vikings could be much improved this year.

"We're young, but not young-young," he said. "We have a couple of good arms (pitching) and based on the five-on-one sessions we've had so far,

we're going to be OK (at the plate) and score some runs."

Hightower said he feels the Vikings were in position to win some games last season, but untimely walks proved to be a problem in several games.

"Bases on balls may have been a problem last season," he said. "We've got to be able to throw strikes and give our team a chance. You can't walk people, give them free outs and expect to win ball games."

Key players for MGM are seniors Jarrett Hendrix and Chase Lefeaux. "Jarrett is one of the top pitchers on the team and will also play in the

infield," said Hightower. "Chase will also pitch and also spend time in the outfield."

There are a couple of juniors — Zach Jones and Tucker Musgrove — who will also spend a lot of time in the outfield.

The season starts Feb. 18 with MGM hosting St. Luke's. As in previous years, the Vikings have a tough schedule, with Davidson, Theodore, Alma Bryant and Baker joining them in always tough Class 7A, Area 1. But there are several other tough teams on the schedule, including McGill-Toolen, UMS-Wright, Fairhope and Daphne.

LADY VIKINGS: Experienced squad rich in leadership

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"She's a pretty good utility player," Culbreth said of Wall. "In the past few years, she's been a good pinch runner for us."

Another player to watch is junior pitcher Victoria Nichols, who Culbreth will also rely on to provide leadership as well. "Victoria was a good leader last year, but now she's grown into a great leader," she said.

Freshman pitchers Pearl Whitaker and Mallory Atchison should also help the Vikings. "Pearl has really pulled herself together and become a key part of our team," said Culbreth. "We pulled Mallory up (to the varsity) as an eighth-grader and she helped us last year. She helped us to go to the area, regional and state tournaments."

As far as concerns, there are only a few, according to Culbreth. While there is some youth on the squad, it has gotten to the point even the young players have grown up in a hurry.

"We have some great assistants to help pull weight, so we don't have to worry a lot when it comes to the other team," she said. "Our teams have been very young for the last few years and the young girls are now juniors who have returned for this season. The youth has grown up."

But another more pressing issue is depth, or more specifically, the lack of depth. "We're slim in several spots," Culbreth said. "Our numbers are not as high (as other teams). We're trying to develop players and develop them as they come up to high school. We're working with the middle school programs really closely."

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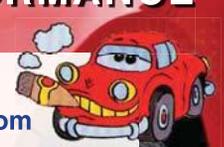
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