

FAITH: Defending champs led by two pitching stars

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Saraland, and the climb is made a bit more difficult.

With the challenges the Rams face, it's good to have two mainstays of the pitcher's mound returning in starter Eli Giles (the state championship MVP last spring) and an effective closer in James Flynn, who threw the last pitch of the championships, an infield popup that sealed a 7-3 victory.

Seymour said there are a lot of open positions up and down the lineup. Bryant Andrews will be available at third base or the outfield, and Giles, in non-pitching games, will get a spot in the outfield as well. Michael Hopkinson and Noah Broadus are two top prospects in the infield, but Seymour said most of those positions will feature competition for the starting spot during preseason practices.

And what would the Faith Rams be without someone named Bell on the field. This year, look for J.G. Bell out there.

Giles, a junior this year and an Alabama commit, rose rapidly in the



Faith's state championship ring

latter weeks of his sophomore year, after starter Gabe Shepard hurt his arm against St. Paul's in a regular-season game and ended up on the sidelines with Tommy John surgery. Giles picked up the team and helped carry it through the rest of the season and the 10-game winning streak that was the playoffs last spring.

Giles is a power pitcher who hits the high 80s regularly and sometimes can reach the 90s. He also has breaking stuff that will keep hitters guessing and honest. Seymour has also said Flynn may do more than close this year,

but like much about this upcoming year, that is still a work in progress.

Seymour sized up the new area opposition he'll have to face this year. "Saraland is tough; I know they are very senior-heavy with that group. They'll be tough to beat," Seymour said. "We're looking forward to the challenge, though. Class 6A is a very tough league.

"My first year as head coach we had a very young team. We started seven freshmen in that first year in 2013. We took our lumps, but those kids took valuable experience, and that's the group that we for the past few years have been successful with.

"We're blessed with three state championship appearances and I attribute that to playing those kids (when they were) young. So we're back at that point, a little older than those guys. Our job is to build kids in spirit, athletically and to play hard when we get on the field."

The Rams will open the 2019 season Feb. 18 in the Hank Aaron Classic at Hank Aaron Stadium.

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