

Hope springs eternal for Lady Trojans

By Joey Falkoff

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Spring is said to be a time of hope and renewal.

Following what was a tumultuous 2007 season both on and off the field, it's fair to say no team is happier to see a new spring arrive than the Colby Lady Trojan softball team.

In December 2006, just a couple months before the start of the '07 season, 13-year veteran head softball coach Carl Adams shockingly died of a heart attack.

Playing with his memory in their heads and his name painted atop the scoreboard, the Lady Trojans scuffled through a 21-31 season, finishing sixth in the Jayhawk West and fourth at the regional tournament.

Everything considered, head coach Ryan Sturdy couldn't have asked for more.

"I'm pleased with how we finished with all the adversity we went through," said Sturdy, who was Adams' assistant before taking over for him. "It's been harder on the sophomores, since they were recruited by him, but they've done as well as they can making the transition to a new coach."

Nine players on this year's team were recruited by Adams.

With his memory still in the back of their heads, the Lady Trojans will try and turn the page and get back on track in 2008.

A little less than a third of the way through the season, the Lady Trojans are off to a 7-8 start. They are 2-4 in the league and 0-4 in the region, but Sturdy remains optimistic the best is yet to come.

"I think we are where we need to be right now," said Sturdy. "We're shooting to play our best baseball in April and May. I expect big things from this team. We have more talent this year than last year."

Colby returns seven starters from last year.

Leading the way offensively for the Lady Trojans has been second baseman Ninotska Amaro. Amaro hit .400 with six home runs as a freshman. This year, she's hitting .513 and has already matched her six home run total of last year.

"Amaro has had a great spring so far," said Sturdy. "She's hitting the ball the most consistent for us right now. We need everyone to jump up to her level."

Other than Amaro, it's been a struggle for the Lady Trojans with the bats thus far.

Their next best hitter is sophomore infielder Courtney Duell, who is hitting right at .300 and only sophomore Jill Schmidt has more than one home run.

Things hit rock bottom Wednesday at Seward County, when the Lady Trojans combined for just one hit in two games.

"We play well when we hit, but we struggle when we don't," said Sturdy. "We need to get more consistent on the offensive side."

Sturdy is hoping freshmen Tina Fabrizio from Broomfield, Colo., and Amber Cowan from Good-



FILE PHOTO

Colby Lady Trojan sophomore infielder Courtney Duell is one nine returning players to this year's team. Duell is hitting .300 so far this season. The Lady Trojans are off to a 7-8 start, but will look to get back over .500 when they host the Colby Community College Spring Softball Tournament this weekend.

land can provide some punch. Fabrizio is hitting just .182, but is still recovering from gall bladder surgery. Cowan transferred in at semester, and is just 1-13 in limited action.

Even if the offense continues to struggle, the Lady Trojans should be able to stay in games with their pitching staff.

Colby's top three starters, Karri Panno, Brittani Kage and Amaro, all return from last year.

Panno is Colby's #1 starter, and is off to a 3-5 start with a 2.73 ERA. Kage is 2-3 with a 5.48 ERA and Amaro is 2-0 with a 5.73 ERA.

"If we can get all three going we'll have a good staff," said Sturdy. "They each have different styles so it should be fun."

Trojan fans will get their first extended look at this year's team during this weekend's Colby Community College Spring Softball Tournament. Colby's 12 p.m. game Saturday against McCook, Neb., is the first of six they will play this weekend at Carl Adams Field.

This weekend's tournament is the first of seven home dates the Lady Trojans have the rest of March.

Also highlighting their schedule

is a trip to eastern Kansas Apr. 5-7 to take on Johnson County Community College and Neosho Community College. The Lady Trojans host the Allen Wolf Tournament April 19-20, which features Jayhawk teams like Cloud County, Barton County and Dodge City.

Seward County is currently leading the seven-team region with a 5-1 record. Butler County, ranked eighth in the country, is 3-1.

Colby will have to get by both of those teams at the Regional Tournament May 3-4 in Wichita if they want to accomplish their goal

of getting to the National Tournament in Plant City, Fla., May 15-17. It's something that's never been done in the 23-year history of the program.

But with spring now in full bloom, the Lady Trojans hold out hope they can turn tragedy into triumph this year.

"We've won division championships, but we've never been able to get over the hump at regionals," said Sturdy. "It would be a very big accomplishment for the school. Once we get over the hump it could be an every year occurrence."

Colby Lady Trojan Softball 2008

Last Season: 21-31 (6th in league, 4th at regionals)

Projected Finish: 4th in Jayhawk Conference

This Season: 7-8 (2-4 in league, 0-4 in region)

Returning Players: 9

Starting Lineup: 3B Lynette Ebert, LF Tina Fabrizio/Amber Cowen, C Mary McLaughlin, 1B Jill Schmidt, 2B Courtney Duell, DH Karri Panno/Ninotska Amaro, SS Kat Nickel, RF Erin Myers

Newcomers: Fr. Erin Myers (Lamed), Fr. Amber Cowan (Goodland), Fr. Tina Fabrizio (Broomfield, Colo.), Fr. Kat Nickel (Hastings, Neb.)

Starting Rotation: Karri Panno, Ninotska Amaro, Brittani Kage

Leading Hitter: Ninotska Amaro (.513 6 HR)

Leading Pitcher: Karri Panno (3-5 2.73 ERA)

Three Eagles make All-League squad

After an 18-6 season that concluded with a first round loss to Hesston at the 4A State Tournament, the Colby High boys basketball team had three players named to the All-Northwest Kansas League team released earlier this week.

Junior Levi Schlick (16.1 ppg, 10.6 rpg) and senior Ethan Stover (15.7 ppg, 4.4 rpg) were named to the first team, while junior Stephen Dinkel (12.1 ppg, 5.3 rpg) earned Honorable Mention recognition.

Colby's three representatives ranks behind only Goodland and Quinter, who each had four, as the most in the league.

The Eagles and Goodland tied for the Northwest Kansas League crown, each finishing with a 6-1 mark in league play.

The full squad is listed below.

Levi Schlick	Colby 6-5 Jr.
Ethan Stover	Colby 6-3 Sr.
Matt Bird	Quinter 6-1 So.
Greg Ferris	Goodland 5-9 Jr.
Matt Weis	Hoxie 6-4 Jr.
Elijah Kastens	Rawlins County 5-7 Jr.
Edward MacHen	Quinter 5-11 Jr.
Lucas Juenemann	Oberlin 5-10 Jr.
Konnel Keller	Oakley 6-0 Sr.

Honorable Mention:	
Luke Ochs	Quinter 6-0 Jr.
Ted Crabtree	St. Francis 6-2 Sr.
Tanner Smith	Goodland 6-1 Sr.
Stephen Dinkel	Colby 6-0 Jr.
Brady Reed	Quinter 5-10 So.
Brandon Rome	Goodland 6-0 Jr.
Preston Dautel	Goodland 5-10 Sr.

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Nebraska ousts Missouri


KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — With Aleks Maric scoring 17 points, pulling down 13 rebounds and making a key block in the final seconds, Nebraska survived the first round of the Big 12 tournament Thursday night for only the second time in nine years.

But look who awaits the Huskers (19-11) in Friday's second round — none other than No. 5 Kansas, which has dominated them in recent years and will no doubt have a big crowd squarely in its corner.

"I'm the happiest guy in the gym, because if we wouldn't have won we wouldn't be getting a chance to play again," said coach Doc Sadler. "The happiness ends there."

The crowd in Kansas City's new Sprint Center is certain to be heavily pro-Kansas. The last two times the Jayhawks caught Nebraska at home they blew them out 92-39 and 84-49.

In their game in January in Lawrence, Maric failed to score for the first time since his sophomore year.



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