

Swedes look to replace veteran threesome

Written by Greg Viergutz

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It isn't enough that Amanda Barkmeier and Jordyn Haake have to fill the shoes of four-year starting pitcher Bre Messersmith this season, but they're going to have to do it three feet further away from home plate.

The Nebraska State Activities Association has added three feet to the distance between home plate and the pitcher.

"That means there is a bigger commodity for good defense because more balls are going to be put into play," Swede coach Roger Neujahr said. "The purpose of going to 43 feet was to get more action. Instead of getting one pitcher that just dominates, hopefully, this will put more action in the game."

That's okay with Neujahr because he thinks he has the pitchers that can be successful at the longer distance.

"In my opinion, I think that the pitcher that throws hard and fast will have a disadvantage compared to that pitcher who can have movement on her specialty pitches," he said. "If you can throw a drop, a curve, the screwball, the rise, I honestly think that will make that pitcher better at 43 feet."

And he thinks he's got the hitters to take advantage of the longer look at the pitch.

Barkmeier posted good statistics on the mound last year as a freshman. She was 8-1 while fanning 61 batters and walking just 10 with an earned run average of 1.23 over 57 innings.

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Haake saw limited action after recovering from ACL surgery prior to the start of the season.

“She’s had a good summer of pitching and a good fall so far,” Neujahr said. “We expect some good things from Jordyn.”

Joining Messersmith in the group of hard-to-replace players are four-year starters Vanessa Linegar at catcher and utility infielder Ali Abramson.

The Swedes will look to senior Shelby Eggleston for leadership at the plate. She has a .390 career batting average and was second on the team in hitting that last two years.

Neujahr said that while it will be difficult to replace the long-time starters, the team has good depth with players who are battling hard for starting positions.

“I think our kids understand this now,” he said. “Every year, there isn’t a secure position for anybody. We base it on

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