

2011 success drives Swedes in 2012

Written by Deb Egenberger
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Swede softball players enter the 2012 season with an eye on the past as well as the future.

You could say they have some unfinished business from last year. Gothenburg won a game at the state tournament last season, but losses to teams that finished the season ranked No. 1 and No. 3 knocked the Swedes out of the state bracket.

“That’s a sign that we’re right in the ball park,” coach Roger Neujahr said. “We always want more. I think the kids felt that they wanted more.”

Gothenburg lost two seniors off a team that posted school records in wins (25), hits (281), RBI’s (184) and five other categories.

“That experience is valuable,” he said. “(Recently) when we did some full defensive work, you could hear the communication and just feel that they’d been there before.”

That didn’t come until midway through the season last year.

So, everyone will step into their previous roles and the team will continue on the path of success, right? Well, hopefully mostly right.

“As always, everybody has to earn their position in a new season,” the coach said. “This will probably be the least amount of changes that we’ve had since the program started. But, again, there still may be changes.

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“We’ve got some quality kids that have come in that are pushing for positions. That doesn’t matter what grade level.”

If anyone has a lock on staying put as a starter, it’s senior pitcher Amanda Barkmeier. She already owns career records in strikeouts, shutouts and no-hitters to go along with other season and game marks.

The challenge is to determine a backup.

“We’re working on trying to find some other pitching which we need dearly,” Neujahr said.

SOFTBALL SCHEDULE	
Aug. 18—at So. Valley (r-v), 4:30	Minden, 4:30
Aug. 19—at McCook (r-v), 5:00	Sept. 20—Chadron/Chase Co. at
Aug. 23—at Corad, (r-v), 5:00	Opallala, 3:30/4:30 MT
Aug. 25—Lexington Invite, 9:00	Sept. 22—COTTENBURG
Aug. 30—LEXINGTON (r-v), 5:00	INVITE (v), 11
Sept. 1—McCook Invite, 8:00	Sept. 25—at North Platte (r-v),
Sept. 7-8—Scottabluft Invite	8:00
(r-v), TBD	Sept. 27—DODD (r-v), 5:00
Sept. 13—HOLDREGE (r-v), 5:00	Oct. 4-5—DISTRICT MEET
Sept. 15—GINN Invite, 9:00	Oct. 10-12—Class C state meet
Sept. 18—Lancton/Minden at	and Hearings

That help could come from a pair of newcomers—sophomore Rebecca Riley and freshman Sam Tiedemann.

The coach is hoping for improvement on defense. “We need to handle some things in a couple of areas that we were weak last year,” he said.

On offense, he’d like the team to be more dominant, particularly with extra-base hits. We did an outstanding job last year with batting averages, stolen bases and hit-and-runs, he said. “We need to hit the hit-and-run more,” he said, hoping for more extra-base hits in those situations.

A big plus with the large senior class—six players—is the mentoring they are doing with less experienced players. For example, slap hitter Shay Wear has been giving tips to freshman Kylee Beyea.

“I’ve learned that it is much better to come from a teammate that they have respect for and

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that's proven that they are a ball player" than from a coach, Neujahr said. "It's been as good as it's ever been with that type of input."

The Swede schedule takes on a new look. St. Paul and Grand Island Northwest have ended contracts early so they can play each other. Making up for those losses is a second date with Cozad (here on Sept. 27) and a just-added triangular Sept. 18 with Lexington and the Whippets at Minden.

Gothenburg hosts the district tournament Oct. 4 and 5, which Neujahr said could be very competitive. Southern Valley improved considerably last year and should be better this year, he said. Chadron is now in Class C and will also be better as the young squad added a year of experience last season.

Gothenburg opens the season this week with a pair of road games. The Swedes will get a look at district foe Southern Valley Thursday before traveling to McCook on Friday.

Team members (* denotes letter winners):

Seniors—Amanda Barkmeier*, Brittyn Munster*, Siera Schwanz*, Shay Wear*, Hanna Wolf*, Taylor Wolf*.

Juniors—Emily Franzen*, Kyndal Holmes*.

Sophomores—Ashley Eskew*, Haley Meyers, Rebecca Riley, Tish Winter.

Freshmen—Kylee Beyea, Morgan Cardenas, Katlin Harm, Olivia Lafleur, Sam Tiedemann.