



Coach Carter, Redbirds anticipate solid season ahead in 2017

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – Like teams all over Illinois, Alton's softball squad is anticipating a solid season for spring 2017.

“We're excited,” said Redbird coach Dan Carter. “It's always a fun time of the year to get out here and get the new girls out here and get the veteran girls and get them up to speed and see what we've got.”

The Redbirds are off to a hot start with three straight wins and no defeats. Alton hosts Bunker Hill at 4:15 p.m. today at Alton High School sports complex. Last year's Redbirds finished the season 25-8 overall, 10-4 in the Southwestern Conference before bowing out in the IHSA Class 4A Collinsville Regional final to O'Fallon.

Carter is pleased with how things have gone during the preseason. “We're pretty pleased,” Carter said. “We graduated a couple of quality players from last season – we lost an outfielder, Alicia Goewey, a pitcher, Brittany Roady and lost our leadoff hitter and third baseman, Katelyn Presley; two of them are playing at the college level, so we have some holes to fill, but we're going to be OK.

“Each year, you plan for that; you know what's going to happen, but we have a lot of experience coming back. We have five seniors on the team with a lot of experience (Tomi Dublo, Bronte Fencel, Savannah Fisher, Mikinna Hall and Sydney Hartman).

“Tomi's really going to help us on the infield – a solid second baseman; Savannah is an all-state player at shortstop and that's always nice to have. Our outfielders (Hartman, Fencel and Hall, with Hartman possibly seeing some time inside the pitcher's circle) could be all seniors. We've got a handful of experienced players as well. Tami Wong can play third or catch, and Miranda Hudson can also play third or catch; between those two girls, we're hoping we can fill in at third. We could also move our first baseman, Rachel McCoy, to third and she's doing a nice job there.”

Carter also said that freshman Ashlyn Betz could see time at first and freshman Abby Scyoc has stood out during preseason. “She's (Scyoc) got the ability to play short and pitch, play outfield or second,” Carter said. “She could help us out a lot.”

The roster has a good mix of youth and experience this year, something that makes Carter happy. “I'm kind of excited about that,” Carter said. “We've got some other girls out there – a junior, Lexi Fisher, who could do a lot of things for us; a junior, Sydney Robbins, and a couple of other freshmen who have been practicing with us.

“I don't know where all those girls are going to fit in yet, but we've got 14 key girls that can do a lot of different things for us, which is nice that they can play different positions.”

Alton's schedule includes a slate of area teams outside the SWC. “Outside the conference, we play everybody around,” Carter said. “We'll see some very good pitching outside the conference when you play teams like (Hardin-Calhoun); we play all the local teams, we'll see (Civic Memorial); Jersey's going to a good, strong team, (East Alton-) Wood River, Roxana are all up-and-coming; we play them all.

“Inside the conference, it's going to be tough top to bottom; you get a lot of quality pitching in the conference and great coaching and great experienced players. There's no gimmies in the conference when you walk out there.”

Carter rates Edwardsville as the SWC favorites again this season. “Until someone knocks Edwardsville off, they have to be the favorites,” Carter said. “They went 13-1 last year and a lot of people thought they were going to be down last year; I kept telling people, 'they're the favorite; they're going to be the favorite until someone knocks them off'. Then you've got to throw the Bellevilles in there next; they have good, experienced teams. Top to bottom, the conference is going to be tough.”

Carter believes the Redbirds' experience will be the team's strong point this year. “We've got eight starters coming back and they all have good experience,” Carter said. “They've

done a lot of things for us; I think we're going to hit the ball well and we're going to score some runs. Then you throw in solid defense because we've got a lot of experience back.”

