Wasps Baseball is ready to 'show they're contenders'

Softball looks to build on last year's improvement

By Aaron Rubin
Standard Correspondent

The baseball and softball seasons at Woodstock Union High School are underway as both teams begin to welcome new and returning players, address last year's strengths and weaknesses, and establish a culture of hard work and camaraderie.

The baseball team thought it was over too soon last year, going out in the first round of the playoffs last spring after a loss to Vergennes Union High School.

"That did not sit well with some kids," said head coach Jason Tarleton. "They knew they belonged there, but I think this year they're ready to take that step and start to show that we're contenders."

The pitching and catching staff have begun practicing ahead of tryouts, mainly focusing on plyometric workouts that incorporate speed and agility to help them fine-tune the mechanics of their respective positions.

"The emphasis for catchers is going over blocking mechanics and receiving mechanics," said Tarleton. "Pitchers are primarily focused on their mechanics with wind-up and stretch, footwork around pickoff moves. We haven't started with breaking pitches yet, mostly just fastball stuff; two-seam and four-seam."

The pitching staff consists of juniors Vince Petrone and Ben Runstein; sophomores Aksel Oates, Riley O'Neil; and freshman Ray Petrone, Andrew Gallagher, Jake Blackburn, and Dylan Robiduox. The catching staff consists of senior Josh Hough, junior Jordan O'Neil, and Ray Petrone. All of these players will find themselves playing somewhere on the Varsity and JV teams.

> **"With the incoming freshman, that changes things a lot for us because they're pretty talented kids. We'll be a lot deeper this year."**
> — Baseball coach Jason Tarleton

In total, there are 27 players competing for a spot on the teams, including eight new players, the rest returning, said Tarleton.

Whatever the makeup of the varsity team, there are several strengths and weaknesses that Tarleton says he is looking to see improved upon from last year's season, and bolster even further.

Tarleton said last year's top five batters hit consistently — even more impressive because they were freshman and sophomores at the time.



Ninth-grader Ray Petrone works on his pitch. Rick Russell Photo



Amelia Hurd steps back and prepares for a throw. Rick Russell Photo

On the defense, "All of our pitching is young — we don't have any seniors that are pitchers — I feel like that's a strength," said Tarleton. "All of our pitchers have varsity experience, so I think that they'll be just that much stronger, that much more confident."

Overall, "What we have coming back is a really strong work ethic and that desire to win. That can be contagious," added Tarleton.

As far as weak points go, Tarleton says building greater resiliency is key and persisting through tough games, not giving up a lead. "That was probably a glaring weakness, that was fairly consistent," he said. "We just didn't figure it out on how to put teams away. If we had a lead, we could easily give up the lead and then, seemingly, we would just go into a funk." He added, "With the incoming freshman, that changes things a lot for us because they're pretty talented kids. We'll be a lot deeper this year."

Tarleton continued, "The culture is that we expect to win."

"My sense right now is kids are showing up pretty determined to work and grow and develop team chemistry early on. They have some pretty lofty goals and they seem pretty determined to make things happen," Tarleton said, noting that a key factor for a team is "trust in the coaching staff… Everything's anchored in that."

Tarleton says that the true test will come when the Wasps face White River Valley and Green Mountain Union High Schools. "Those will be pretty good measuring sticks for us to see how we fare against them," he said.

With trust, determination, and hard work, the team is hopeful they can bounce back from last year's early upset in the playoffs and show the state what Woodstock baseball is all about. "I think this year they're ready to take that step and start to show that we're contenders," Tarleton concluded.

Softball rebuilds

Similar to the baseball team, softball was also defeated in the first round of the playoffs last year, losing to Fair Haven High School.

"It was a good game," said head coach Angela Allard. "It started out really well, and then towards the end we kinda lost it a little."

But looking back at the huge improvements the team made last year in nearly every aspect of the game, Allard says the Wasps will continue elevating themselves as players and maintaining strong connections.

This year's pitcher prospects are senior Charley Crowley and sophomore Cameron Allard, both of whom are returning players. The team's catchers are returning sophomore Caleigh Webb and junior newcomer Sammes Gomes.

The 16-member varsity team began practicing this week with nine new players, some of whom have never played softball before, said Allard.

One of the team's greatest strengths from last year's season was the communication between players that assumed a "really supportive" tone, said Allard. "I would say that the confidence of being able to catch the ball and track the ball is going to be really important," added Allard. "I'm hoping that they'll be confident when they're in the batter's box, and then also working on our base running and awareness and the routine plays and making sure everybody's on the same page with where the ball is supposed to go, because, again, they are a lot of new players."

Allard continued, "I'm hoping that'll all transfer through.

See WASPS SOFTBALL - Page 11A



Coach Jason Tarleton talks to the team at the end of practice. Rick Russell Photo



Charley Crowley participates in a softball drill. Rick Russell Photo

WASPS SOFTBALL From Page 10A

We lost a couple of our seniors who were very good leaders in that aspect and so I'm hoping that we have a couple more girls that step up into those roles and really support the team and lead them through the season."

The team's batting lineup "saw a vast improvement throughout" last season, thanks to the help of Dan Moss, father to one of the catchers on last year's team. "I'll have him help us again this year and work with the girls and really focus on that," said Allard.



The softball team runs their "karaoke" drill.

Rick Russell Photo

When it comes to defense, "we had a good pitching and catching duo last year," said Allard, but those positions were previously assumed by seniors. "Now we're trying to look at who's going to step into those shoes," she added.

Communication will remain a pillar within the culture of Wasps softball, as will "positivity, good sportsmanship, and teamwork," said Allard.

"I think really just that support of having your teammates right behind you — even if you do make a mistake or anything like that — that's really important to know that your teammates always have your back and they're still there supporting you, even when that does happen," said Allard.

This support is key "regardless of how the games go," win or lose, added Allard.

"My expectation is never that we necessarily win, but that we're doing our absolute best and that we're doing everything that we can," she said.