

Returning talent means high hopes for Ross

BY KEVIN SHIELDS • Sports Writer • March 22, 2010

FREMONT -- It's always a good thing when two of your best players touch the ball on every defensive play.

That was the case a year ago, and will be again this season for Ross softball coach Mike Gilbert.

The 2010 edition of the Little Giants features returning Greater Buckeye Conference Player of the Year, in senior pitcher Jordyn Gallagher and returning first team all-GBC and all-district catcher in junior Casey Clark.

"We're very fortunate to have those two back," Gilbert said of the duo. "When your pitcher and catcher are two of your hardest workers, it's a good thing."

Last season for Ross, it was a great thing, as the duo fronted a defense that was the squad's backbone. It was a year during which the Little Giants won the GBC championship for the first time since 2000 with respective records of 13-8 and 8-2. Before last season, Ross was 35-64 since 2005.

"I think we'll be pretty good again," Gilbert said. "I think we're also a little bit faster this year ... that should help."

It will especially help the Little Giants in the field, backing-up one of the top players in Ross history to ever set foot in the circle. Gallagher, who set two school records and tied a third as a junior, returns after posting a 13-6 record with a 1.35 ERA.

Her 170 strikeouts last season, broke a Ross record that was previously held by Miranda Steinberger. She also only walked 11 batters in 19 games, a new single-season Little Giants' record, and also set a record with 15 strikeouts in a GBC game with Lima Senior.

"She's had a great career," Gilbert said. "I think one of the reasons she was successful last year was because the whole team played much better defense behind her."

Ross scored three runs per game, gave up two runs

per contest and averaged just 1.2 errors.

With the bat, Gallagher hit .235 -- fifth-best on the team behind Clark's team-leading .414 average. Clark's 12 doubles, 29 hits and nine RBI were also Little Giant bests.

"They both will lead by example," Gilbert said of his pitcher and catcher. "They aren't the hollering-type of kids. They work hard and I think the team picks up on that."

Gilbert points out that hitting with runners in scoring position was something his Ross lineup struggled with.

"My biggest concern is hitting with people on base," Gilbert said. "Like any team, to win a game, you need the clutch hits. Last year, though we were pretty successful, we didn't hit as well as we need to hit."

Switch-hitting sophomore McKenzie Schneider will be one of the speedy players that Gilbert talked of, as last season she led the team in steals. The center fielder and lead-off hitter is joined in the outfield by sister Alexis Schneider (left field) and Sara Gowitzka (right field).

The other sister-pairing Gilbert has is the Gallagher sisters, as freshman McKenzie Gallagher (pitcher/third baseman) joins Jordyn.

"I have two pretty good pitchers with them," Gilbert said.

McKenzie Gallagher will be relied upon the pitch the games her sister doesn't toss.

"I can kind of break her in easily," Gilbert said. "Jordyn had to pretty much do it on her own."

Other newcomers expected to make an impact in the infield are Sidney Swaisgood (third baseman/outfielder), Kaylee Amor (first baseman) and Andra Snodgrass (first baseman).

Amor and Snodgrass will present Gilbert with some size and strength.

"They have size going for them, which is something we haven't had too much of," Gilbert said. "We're hoping their size and strength will add some extra base hits."

Solidifying the infield are senior shortstop Tayler Redinger (.271) and junior second baseman Christy Meggitt (.222).

Gilbert, now in his 12th season as Ross coach, expects a tough road in defending the GBC title.

"It's up for grabs," Gilbert said of the league. "We were very fortunate to win last season. We played five or six extra-inning games and won them all. That doesn't happen very often."

The Little Giants host non-conference rival Bowling Green in their season opener next Monday (March 29).



Pitcher Jordyn Gallagher, the reigning Greater buckeye conference player of the year, throws a pitch during a game last season against Bowling Green. (News-Messenger file photo)