

PREP SOFTBALL

Area diamonds sparkling

■ Talented local teams have eye on championship seasons

High school softball season is underway and here are the teams and players you need to know about.

Arlington: The Tigers look poised to get back to the state tournament for the second time in three years after losing in the regionals in 2015. Taylor Manley went 20-7 with a 1.25 ERA and batted .390 with 18 RBI. Brianna Lewis chipped in with six wins and a .329 average while Alyssa Merritt hit .358. The top offensive threat, though, is catcher Kendall Lee, who hit four homers and drove in 37 runs while batting an eye-popping .495.

Bolton: District 14-AAA will be a battle and the Wildcats will have a lot to say about where the title ends up. The team's standout is all-metro third baseman Tori Markle (.431, 18 RBI last year), and she'll get plenty of support from senior shortstop Jamie Tharpe (.350, 25 runs scored), outfielder Lauren Bolton and utility player Kalin Dunn. Loren Hill, injured last year, will handle the pitching duties.

Brighton: A rival coach said the Cardinals may be the best team in West Tennessee. There's certainly lots of talent back from last year's squad that lost to Collierville by one run in a lightning-shortened AAA sub-state game. Pitcher Seeley Layne will be a player of the year candidate after going 19-7 last spring while first baseman Haley Rider (.510), utility player Marissa Moss and outfielder TaMaya Johnson were also all-metro. Brighton's JV team went 23-0 last year and some of those players will contribute as well.

Collierville: The Dragons, a state tournament regular in AAA, suffered some major graduation losses, headed by two-time Best of the Preps player of the year Bayleigh Wisher. Eleven out of the 15 players on the roster

are either ninth- or 10th-graders. And there are only two seniors but they're both very good, BOP finalist Kelsey Gross (13-4, 108 strikeouts while batting .456 with seven homers and 33 RBI) and veteran first baseman Shelby Crocker.

Covington: Good senior leadership up and down the order bodes well for the Chargers as they chase a AA state tournament bid. Treasury Poindexter batted an amazing .550 and stole 48 of 49 bases. Neely Glenn, a four-year starter at shortstop, also made all-metro after batting .495 with four homers and 22 RBI. The key could well be Anna Adkison, who takes over the majority of the pitching duties. If she can match the efforts of now-graduated ace Maddie Lane, Covington can do some damage.

DeSoto Central: The Jaguars have gotten plenty of offense through their first 12 games of the year (10 victories). Maddy Politte, Kayla Murphy, Grace Ann Ferguson and Sterling James were all batting over .400 heading into last weekend while Mattie Meine was an all-metro choice in 2015. James, a freshman, leads the pitching staff with a 7-1 record.

Fayette Academy: Even with seven of nine starters being in the 10th grade or younger, the Vikings have a great shot to match last year's run to the D2-A sub-state round. Shortstop Kaitlin Bowers (.484) and center fielder Kristin McNabb (.404) lead the offense. Kaylie Carter won 14 games as an eighth-grader last year while coach Peter Moffatt expects freshman Kara Cousar to make an immediate impact at third.

Harding: After finishing 17-13 last year, the Lions look poised to take another step forward and possibly challenge TRA as the top D2-A team in the area.

Kayley Underwood struck out 134 while walking only 27 in 157 innings last year and has already had some excellent outings this spring. She is also the team's top returning hitter with a .348 average and will get plenty of help from sophomores Sarah and Emily Coleman, junior Kendall Ford and senior Melissa King.

Houston: After reaching the AAA tournament last year, the Mustangs will have some big holes to fill, most notably ace pitcher Jenna Cotter and slugging catcher Mary Collins, BOP finalists both. Kayla Parker and Michelle Myers were all-metro choices last year as ninth- and 10th-graders respectively and will make sure the Mustangs don't fall too far off the pace.

Lewisburg: The Patriots have opened with nine victories in 13 games and figure to keep making noise right through to the postseason. Senior Paige Dill and freshman Anna Gregg have provided the offense while Katie Brownlee (0.79 ERA in nine appearances) is the top pitcher.

Munford: The Region 7 champs missed out on a trip to state by losing to Houston in the AAA sub-state. Lots of talent returns, though, led by senior pitcher-first baseman Sam Scott (17-10, 1.65 ERA, 202 strikeouts), sophomore third baseman Makayla Pugh (.340, 24 RBI), second baseman Kelsey Frizzell and outfielder Amber Alverson. As many as six starters could be freshmen and sophomores, but if the Cougars' bats come around, watch out.

Southaven: Another DeSoto County team that is off to a fast start (8-3), the Chargers are led by pitcher Sage Koczka, who earned all-metro recognition as an eighth-grader in 2015.

St. Benedict: Several key players are gone from last year's team that went 33-9 and finished third in the D2-AA state tournament.



BRANDON DILL/SPECIAL TO THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Rachel Whitley, who won 16 games in her freshman season, and her Tipton-Rosemark Academy squad will again be among the best in Div. 2-A.

A strong freshman class led by outfielder E.C. Taylor has enrolled and should combine nicely with returning players like Grace Sweat (.460, 36 RBI), Cameron Caldwell (.398, 39 RBI) and Allison Hyatt (.371).

Tipton-Rosemark: The Rebels' hopes rest on the shoulders of two all-state standouts, senior Taylor Beasley and sophomore Rachel Whitley. Centerfielder Beasley stole 39 of 40 bases last year while batting an amazing .573 and Whitley batted .453 with 42 RBI while winning 16 games.

Add in all-metro catcher Shelby Clifton (.372 45 RBI) and pitcher Katie Diggs (9-0, 0.40 ERA) and you have a the makings of a D2-A state title contender.

White Station: With several key players returning, the Spartans look like the team to beat in 16-AAA. Peyton Cacamissi will do the pitching while shortstop Mallory Ivey and third baseman Francesca Georgianni are also starting for their fourth straight years. Freshman shortstop Lucie Falcasantos is a terrific young talent.

BASEBALL NOTEBOOK

Cardinals fall but lefty Garcia has strong outing

From Our Press Services

JUPITER, Fla. — J.T. Realmuto's two-out, two-RBI bloop single in the sixth broke a 2-2 tie and propelled the Miami Marlins to a 4-2 victory over the St. Louis Cardinals on Sunday.

Realmuto lofted what normally would have been a routine fly ball to right-center field, but Cardinals' right fielder Stephen Piscotty had been positioned to guard the line moments earlier. The ball barely eluded diving center fielder Tommy Pham, allowing Giancarlo Stanton and Martin Prado to score.

The Marlins' comeback overshadowed a strong start by Jaime Garcia. The Cardinals' lefty didn't allow a hit until the fifth inning, when Miami struck for two runs.

The only blemishes on Garcia's line through the first four innings were a pair of walks to Stanton. The Cardinals also intentionally walked the slugger in the sixth.

Sunday was the final spring start for Garcia, but he may remain in Jupiter when the Cardinals head north in order to throw against minor leaguers on Friday, which would be his next scheduled start.

St. Louis has won only once in its last 13 games, dating back to March 12.

Cardinals reliever Jordan Walden, who has been resting a sore right shoulder, is expected to pitch against the Mets today. He hasn't allowed a run in five



EDUARDO VERDUGO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Houston's Leo Heras slides safely to second base under pressure from San Diego's Luis Urias on Sunday during the first MLB series played in Mexico City in 12 years.

appearances this spring, but he hasn't pitched in a game since March 21.

Also on Sunday, St. Louis announced that third base coach Jose Oquendo could miss the season while recovering from surgery on his right knee.

The team said Sunday that the 52-year-old former big league infielder was taking a medical leave of absence for rehabilitation.

"(Doctors) are just concerned that he gets out there and does what he needs to do for this job, that it would certainly lead toward a replacement, which no one likes the idea of, right?" Cardinals manager Mike Matheny said. "So, he's just got to take time."

SPRING HIGHLIGHTS

■ Jabari Blash, Adam Rosales and Jon Jay homered during a nine-run first inning and the San Diego

Padres routed the Houston Astros 21-6 in a split-squad game, finishing up the first Major League Baseball series in Mexico City in 12 years. Blash, forced to leave Saturday night's game in the sixth after being hit in the head by a pitch, connected for a three-run shot. Rosales added a two-run drive and Jay hit a three-run shot. Travis Jankowski and Casey McElroy homered later for the Padres, taking advantage of Mexico City's altitude of 7,350 feet. Mexico City hosted major league games for the first time since March 2004, when the Astros played the Marlins at Foro Sol. This game was played at Fray Nano stadium, which seats 5,000 fans.

■ Steven Matz pitched one-hit ball for 5½ innings, David Wright and Michael Conforto homered and the New York Mets tied the split-squad Washington

Nationals 4-4 at Port St. Lucie, Florida.

■ Blue Jays pitcher Drew Hutchison escaped injury when he was struck in the back of the head by catcher A.J. Jimenez's throw to second base on an attempted stolen base during the fifth inning of a 7-3 victory over the Tampa Bay Rays at Port Charlotte, Florida. The Toronto right-hander high-fived teammates and re-

mained on the bench for a while after being removed from the game. He later described the scary moment as just "one of those weird things that happened," adding he would have argued to continue pitching if it had been a regular-season game.

DEVELOPMENTS

Briefly: The Cleveland Indians say All-Star out-

fielder Michael Brantley is still recovering from shoulder surgery and will not begin the season as a starter. He will continue to rest without baseball activities for the time being. ... The Atlanta Braves acquired left-handed reliever Eric O'Flaherty from the Pittsburgh Pirates for cash considerations. O'Flaherty, 31, pitched for the Braves from 2009-13.

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