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(Neb.)- Eagles Open Season In Texas

By: Jeremy Anderson Posted at: 01/29/2019 02:50 PM

CHADRON, Neb. -- The Chadron State College softball team will open its 2019 season by playing five games in three days at the TAJ Hospitality College Softball Kickoff in Lubbock, Texas, this weekend.

CSC second-year Head Softball Coach Kaley Ness said she is excited to see the team compete.

"We are excited for the opportunity to play in Lubbock and show everyone how hard-working, dedicated and passionate this year's team is."

The Eagles will face five different teams in three days, starting with Oklahoma Christian University and Texas-Permian Basin on Friday. Saturday, CSC is set to face Western New Mexico University and tournament host Lubbock Christian University before rounding out the tournament against Midwestern State University on Sunday.

Chadron State finished the 2018 campaign with a 16-34 record, including a 13-24 showing in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference. The Eagles earned a trip to their third consecutive RMAC tournament during the season, a distinction never before attained by the program.

This year's roster includes 20 players, of whom 14 appeared on last season's roster.

"With the experience we have returning, in addition to the incoming talent, it makes for an exciting future for our program," Ness said.

Of the 14 returners, seven were consistent starters on last years' squad.

Outfielders Alyssa Geist and Ellie Owens both return from last year. Owens, a junior, started every game at center field. Geist, who is a redshirt junior, will be in right field this season after appearing in all 50 games and starting 47 as a sophomore. Owens led the team with 25 runs in 2018.

Sophomore Lauren Renck started nine games last season in the outfield and will be competing with juniors Katelyn Eldridge and Angelica Maples and freshman Makayla McKeehan for the left field spot this season.

CSC returns five more players who combined for 232 starts last year in the infield. Senior Kayla Michel started all 50 contests for the Eagles, playing 39 at first base and 11 at catcher. Of returning players, Michel led the team in batting average, hits, slugging percentage and on base percentage last season.

With 48 total starts as a sophomore, Allie Mason returns in the infield. The junior started at third base 28 times and first base 10 times last season, and will open up 2019 at first base. She finished 2018 batting .305 and led CSC with eight doubles.

Maples and senior second baseman Kendyl Moody also return from 2018. Maples, who batted first in the lineup, had a team high six home runs, 18 RBI's and 11 stolen bases in 2018. Moody appeared as the team's top pinch runner one year before starting 42 games at second as a junior.

Leilani Niccum returns at catcher for the Eagles. The sophomore recorded 39 starts before suffering a season-ending injury during last year's campaign. Niccum finished tied for the team lead with 18 RBI's. Michel and Niccum will be interchangeable as DH's and catchers this spring.

The Eagles return three pitchers from last year. Jessica Jarecki, a two-time All-RMAC recipient and the school record holder in single season strikeouts, is no longer with the team after transferring to Colorado State last year. Junior Megan Horn looks to lead the Eagle pitching. Last season, Horn appeared in 21 games, starting 19 of them. With a record of 5-14, Horn finished with 113.1 innings pitched, recorded 107 strikeouts and had an ERA of 3.89. Seniors Haylee McKeenhan and Dallas Magnusson combined for 10 appearances and three starts last season.

Freshmen Peyton Propp, Britny Davis and Cassidy Horn and sophomore Gabby Russell could all see time in the circle this season as well.

Other individuals who could see playing time at various positions include freshmen Haleigh Hoefs and Bailey Marvel. Junior college transfer, Bailey Rominger, from Eastern Arizona, could also find a spot in the lineup and will help provide valuable depth.

Chadron State was picked 12 out of 13 teams in the RMAC preseason poll released last week.