

Young Lady Colonels softball hopes to get back to state tournament

BY WYATT SPARKMAN

The Oldham County Lady Colonels will be looking for redemption throughout the 2025 season. 2024 was the first year the Lady Colonels failed to make the regional championship since 2018.

Oldham County head coach Chris Lashley has learned from the mistakes last year and hopes to have his returning players continue to use last year as motivation to get better. Lashley has made defense a focal point over the offseason to help get back to the regional championship.

“We’ve all learned from our mistakes last year, so we’ve all grown on that, and we’re really working a lot towards defense this year,” Lashley said. “This is the first year since I’ve been here that we’ve really grinded it out on defense, working on really defensive plays and stuff like that. We’re going to really work hard on our defense this year. We’ll be young, but we’ll be very athletic.”

The Lady Colonels enter the 2025 season with only two seniors on the team, Jozie Lashley and Devyn Collins. Lashley will be counting on his younger players to step up, but he’s seen Jozie and Collins really take leadership of the team.

“They’re both verbally great team leaders,” Lashley said. “Jozie is more of a do it, follow me and follow my ways. Devyn is good at pumping up the team, getting them excited and keeping them motivated all the time in practice. They work really hard for their senior year.”

Jozie sees her and Collins’ leadership as a good balance for the team.

“I’m more of a lead by example, not as vocal, and Devyn is more vocal and uplifting and encouraging through her voice,” Jozie said. “I think us two being captains is really good for our team, because we’ve got an equal balance. We both kind of even each other out.”

Jozie was the ace pitcher for the team last year. She started 13 games and pitched a team-high 139.1 innings while striking out 113 batters. Jozie finished the year with a 2.16 ERA. Jozie played travel ball over the summer against some of the best competition in the nation but has dealt with shoulder recovery over the offseason. She feels prepared going into this season.

“Last year, my shoulder was hurting me pretty good,” Jozie said. “Towards the end of the season, it kind of definitely held me down,



PHOTO BY Wyatt Sparkman

Oldham County senior Jozie Lashley throws a pitch in a 2024 game.

but this year, I think I’m going to have a lot more stamina, a lot more confidence. It’s my senior year. I don’t really have anything to lose, just go out, play and have fun.”

Along with Jozie, sophomore Kailyn Claybern and freshman Laken Nimmo will be in the circle to pitch. Claybern pitched 41.1 innings with 37 strikeouts last year while Nimmo pitched 7.1 innings. Lashley feels like both of them will be able to fit right into the rotation for his team.

“We’ve been going two days a week, doing pitchers and catchers only, and they pitched a ton in JV,” Lashley said. “Luckily, Laken was able to pitch a lot in freshman too, so she’ll be ready to step right in there and go as well. We’ve also got Kennedy Dennison this year. She’s a junior. She pitched JV last year. She’s really been working hard, and she looks really strong right now. She’s hitting her spots great.”

Jozie, at the plate, is the best statistical hitter coming back for the Lady Colonels. Out of returning players, she is the leader in hits, home runs, RBIs and batting average. Lashley has seen her grow a lot at the plate over the offseason.

“She’s really grown a lot as far as being patient, letting the game come to her a little bit more, absorbing the situations and feeding off her teammates,” Lashley said. “I think she’s going to have an exciting year.”

Collins’ batting average was .417, second among returning players. She had 35 hits to go along with 25 RBIs on the season. Collins has worked a lot in the offseason to continue to get better at hitting, competing against some of the

top travel teams, but she is continuing to make strides on the defensive side of softball.

“I’ve been working off the tee, even off the machine has been a great help to myself and my teammates,” Collins said. “Last year, we had a really strong outfield. I think we’ll have that this year as well with me and Jozie out there and even some younger girls as well. Our infield has been rock solid. They take those hard ground balls like it’s nothing. The offseason work we put in has been a great help to lead our team into that good defensive and offensive stride that we work for every year.”

This is Collins’ second year at Oldham County, coming over from South Oldham. She has really enjoyed her time as a Lady Colonel and has developed strong bonds with her coaches and teammates.

“That’s something that I’ve been able to lean on, not just by the older girls from last year, but the younger girls as well,” Collins said. “I’ve just gotten to learn the team styles and just how they run things at OC. I’ve had to learn a lot these past two years. I think I’m finally getting to that point where I have that leadership role but also keeping myself responsible along the way.”

Oldham County will also return one of its top hitters from last year in junior Aubrey Batts. Batts was third on the team last year in hits while hitting a .398 average. She earned 16 walks last year, second most on the team, while also striking out the least from someone who played 25 or more games. Batts is coming straight into softball season after finishing basketball season.

“I’ve told Aubrey this before, but she’s someone I really look up to simply because of the hard work and dedication she puts in,” Collins said. “I know when I was a multi-sport athlete, I did not put that much work into it. That just shows how dedicated she is, and the hard work does pay off for her. She goes into basketball season, knocks that out. She goes right into softball season, and she shows out.”

Lashley is excited to get Batts back after basketball season and knows it gets her into shape to start the year. He considers Batts a veteran, because she has been with the program since seventh grade.

“She hasn’t missed that much, really, and the good thing is, they’re all such a tight-knit group of girls that play for each other,” Lashley said. “As soon as she gets here, she’ll be right back in the mix.”

The Lady Colonels will also get two power hitters back in juniors Bekah Townsend and Sydney Wirth. Lashley wants them to be steady throughout the year and continue to grow as players.

“If [Townsend and Wirth] just play steady ball, we’re going to have a great season,” Lashley said. “If they just go out there and play and do their thing and just keep developing and growing as players, we’re going to have a good team this year.”

Jozie works out and lifts with Townsend and has done so for the past three years. She has seen a lot of growth from her over the years.

“[Townsend] has always had a really good bat, but I think this year she’s really taken her lifting and everything very

seriously, because she knows she’s going to be one of the bigger players on our team this year,” Jozie said. “Bekah is very much a good leader. She’s always been that, even as a sophomore, so we definitely look to her as one of our leaders, even though she’s not a senior. Me and Devyn definitely both look at her like she’s a senior, and she’s definitely a core leader of our team.”

Having a younger team this year, Jozie has seen players like Wirth and Nimmo step up over the offseason, along with sophomores Kayla Cartledge and Claybern. Jozie has also seen freshman Natalie Cheatham and eighth grader Leah Oberholtzer grow a lot and expects them to show up when the team needs them.

“I think us being young, I don’t think it’s going to hurt us, because we work very, very hard,” Jozie said. “We just have to get settled into that role playing at the varsity level, just being able to deal with that outside noise and everything. I think being young is going to help us. We’re going to be quick, and I think we’ll have to have a lot of grit.”

Collins feels like sophomores Lori Edgar and Madilynn Brown will have a big impact on the team as well with having strong arms and position flexibility.

“People think that having a younger team is a weakness, but for us, it’s a strength,” Collins said. “Our girls are very hard working...There are also some girls that work very hard. I think just having that big group of younger girls is very strong for this season, but upcoming seasons as well, it gives us some-

thing to look forward to and just something to count on, knowing that these girls will have that varsity experience and get to challenge themselves a little more this season.”

Oldham County’s opening game will be at the Boone County Lady Rebels on Tuesday, March 18 at 6 p.m. Lashley balanced out the schedule this year, so his team isn’t worn down by the end of the season.

“We’ve kind of balanced it out a little bit more,” Lashley said. “Whereas last year, we were playing as many top 10 teams as we could, and by the time we got to the end of the season, we were a little bit worn out. We’ve learned from that. We set the schedule a little bit differently, and it’s going to be exciting to watch these girls grow.”

Going into their senior seasons, Jozie hopes that her and Collins leave Oldham County Softball better than when they got there. Jozie wants her time as a Lady Colonel to be remembered positively.

“I think me and Devyn definitely look at it as we want to be the senior leaders that are looked up to, like, ‘hey, our senior leaders were really good last year, so you guys need to fill in Devyn and Jozie’s role,’” Jozie said. “Me and Devyn, obviously, have four more years of softball to play, but high school is definitely going to be the core memories of softball for us. We want to make a postseason run for sure. Our goal is obviously to be region champions, but we just have to work every day to get 1% better every day.”

Being in her second year at Oldham County, Collins wants to leave a mark as someone who grew and developed her game, and people can see that growth.

“I struggled a lot in my beginning years of softball, but these last two years, in my final season at OC, I just hope to make an impact, showing that we got to this point,” Collins said. “We did what we needed to do, all that hard work paid off. The ultimate goal for us is to get to that state tournament and be the Region Eight Champs. We had our chance last year. We struggled a little bit, but I think this year, that brought us more preparation, and it just got us more fired up and wanting to win that region title. It’s just something for us to look forward to as seniors but also something to look back on in the future.”

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FROM PAGE B1

Oldham County junior Aubrey Batts answered the 9-0 run with two free throws and a putback. Jarrard made a putback of her own to end the third quarter, giving the Lady Bearcats a 59-25 lead.

To start the fourth quarter, DaSilva made a mid-range shot before Anderson County eighth grader Anna Rhody made a layup. Wood made a layup before working the post and hitting another layup for her final bucket as a Lady Colonel with just over two minutes left in the game.

Oldham County freshman Halle Doelker scored the last point of the game on a free throw. Anderson County won 61-32.

Hook wants to steady what his team runs throughout next season. He threw a lot at his young team and wants to pin down the identity going into next year. Hook has seen senior Lilly Newcom and



PHOTO BY Wyatt Sparkman

Oldham County eighth grader Kayla DaSilva shoots a shot in a 61-32 loss to Anderson County in the first round of the Eighth Region Tournament.

Haley Wood make a huge impact on the younger girls and the program. Hook wants them to know when they hang banners that they are a

big reason why. “I was their third head coach for both of them, and they both pushed really hard,” Hook said. “They

made us tougher and better every practice, every day. I just can’t say enough about both those young women. They’re going to be success-

ful in everything they do. Lilly wants to be an engineer, and Haley is a governor scholar. These are two incredible people. We get caught up in points a lot of time, but I’m just thrilled I get to coach doctors and lawyers and engineers and teachers and mothers. We have great people.”

Hook wants Newcom and Wood to know that they left the program better than they found it.

“When they go on, if they choose to have a family and daughters of their own, I hope this experience helps their life,” Hook said. “When they overcome adversity, they take the lessons they’ve learned, good and bad here, and they take it with them. I think athletes are the most successful people in our society. I think they’re going to take a lot of the lessons that Haley and Lilly have learned, and they’re going to apply it to being successful young women. They’re going to make this country, as a whole, a lot better.”