

**For Immediate Release**

**April 2, 2007**

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**Meramec Magic Athletic News**

**April, 2007**

### **Softball Squad Looks To Rebound With Added Depth**

Could the Meramec Magic softball squad be the St. Louis Rams of 1999, and shock everyone following a slow start? That's the determination the team and first year head coach **Kim Ridenour** are holding as they approach the midway point of the season. The squad has been plagued by a lack of depth, with as few as nine players in some games.

"As soon as we get more players we'll be more confident and won't be worried about getting hurt," said second baseman/pitcher **Diana Keller** (Pacific.) "We have a strong team," she said, "just depth is killing us."

And, help has arrived in the form of a pair of top-notch athletes who played soccer in the fall - **Theresa Weil** (Oakville - a traditional softball power) and **Tara Baechle** (St. Pius X.) The duo will be in uniform and available when the Magic resume action Monday (Apr. 2) hosting Three Rivers in a 3:00 doubleheader.

Shortstop **Alex Branstetter** (Parkway West) was lost for the season a few weeks ago when she tore her shoulder diving into second base, however, the injury has not dampened her enthusiasm.

"All of our players are going to come together and we're going to win some games," said Branstetter.

The team got its first victory against Lewis and Clark Mar. 21 in a 6-1 win and currently sits at 1-22 heading into April. Coach Ridenour feels the team will rebound.

"Numbers are small, but we have a lot of heart and a lot of guts which is what it takes to win championship games," said Ridenour, a former Meramec player in 1999 and 2000.

"Every day they come out and give me everything they got - there's days they could easily give up, but they still give me everything."

In the case of the Magic, everything is quite a bit with a talented team at all positions. Diana Keller, the lone returner from last year, plays second base and pitches.

"She has really stepped it up and been a great leader for the kids, and a positive role model," said Ridenour. "She could easily say 'we have small numbers and it's not going to work' but every day she challenges herself and challenges everybody else."

The team traveled to Phoenix, Arizona during Spring Break Week Mar. 9-17 and played in two tournaments - the Maricopa Tourney and the Central Arizona Tourney. Although they came away winless, the trip still had its merits as the Magic faced some of the nation's top-ranked programs.

"We don't go down there to get creamed, we go down there to learn," said Ridenour. "I want my players to really see what confidence is walking on the field and what discipline and intimidation really is."

Ridenour is equally confident in her own players' abilities, such as outfielder **Jeanna Streiler** (Pacific), a Maryville University transfer.

"She has tremendous range and an awesome arm," said Ridenour. "You won't see a lot of her diving out there because she's so quick. She's also very vocal - I always hear her at practices and games moving people around which is crucial for a center fielder."

Rounding out the Meramec outfield is **Leah Thomas** (Herculaneum), a Jefferson College transfer, in left, and **Lauren Jones** (Dardanelle, Arkansas) in right. "She (Jones) is extremely fast," said Ridenour. "We've been working hard on her hitting and trying to turn her into a slap hitter because she's so fast." **Mallory Fannin** (Fox) has been a valuable utility player, playing in the outfield and anywhere else where needed.

On the infield, **Sonya Galloway** (Farmington) and **Erica Thompson** (Parkway North) share the duties at first base. "They're tall, they're versatile," said Ridenour. "They've got really good range, they're also my catchers as well. I can flop them and be totally comfortable."

Pitching the majority of the starts is a pair of right-handers - **Nikki Adams** (Dardanelle, Arkansas) and **Leslie Kennedy** (Quitman, Arkansas.)

"They're a couple of firecrackers on the mound," said Ridenour. "Leslie tends to be more outgoing - she's a newer pitcher but she's got a lot of spunk behind her and she's got a lot of fire on the ball. Nikki has really good pitching talent and knows what she's doing."

The Magic enter a busy first week of April with doubleheaders on Monday and Wednesday (Apr. 2 and 4) followed by the Illinois Central Tournament over the weekend (Apr. 6-7.) With lots of softball to be played, the team feels it has plenty of time to put the season back on track.

"We have a lot of potential - it's just putting it all together," said Galloway. "We usually get hits in spurts but not really connect them together but it's coming together slowly. I think we're getting better little by little."

### **Last Inning Rally Over Jefferson Re-Energizes Baseball Squad**

It could be the spark that ignites the rest of the season for the Magic baseball team. With the prospect of dropping both ends of a doubleheader to Jefferson College Mar. 29, the Magic would definitely suffer a loss not only in score, but in spirit to their hated rival.

"It would have been damaging to our confidence," said head coach **Tony Dattoli**, "especially to our freshmen, confidence is a big factor."

Down 3-2 in the bottom of the seventh inning, Meramec already had its wake-up call two innings earlier when runner **Brett Allen** (Eureka) was thrown out at the plate. After the play was over, he was shoved by the Jefferson pitcher, who was backing up the play. The proverbial sleeping dog was now wide awake, and foaming at the mouth as both benches threatened to empty. "I saw fire out of our kids I hadn't seen this year," said Dattoli.

"It was a dog fight," said outfielder **Lou Vangel** (CBC), "they scored, we scored. They went up, then there was a scuffle at the plate. The team was fired up - it was as intense as you could get."

As the Meramec hooted and hollered its approval on every pitch, the bottom of the seventh rolled around with Jefferson up 3-2. **Larry Von Dracek** (Hazelwood West) led off with a double, followed by pinch hitter Vangel, who laid down a perfect sacrifice bunt to send the speedy Von Dracek to third with the tying run.

Another pinch hitter, **C.J. Peterson** (North County - Bonne Terre) doubled to tie the game at three. Continuing to show the team's depth, Dattoli went to the bench again for pinch hitter **Jon Myers** (Ft. Zumwalt S.) who rolled an infield single to the left side, setting up first and third with one out.

Designated hitter **Justin Rahn** (CBC) then put the exclamation point on the comeback, hitting a line drive shot that landed on the warning track for a game-winning single and a 4-3 final.

"I think this is going to snowball into something really, really good," said Vangel. "This is exactly what we needed. They say the fight comes out in the dog, and it finally came out in that game."

But the team hasn't exactly been sleepwalking all season, racking up a 19-10-1 mark including a tough Texas swing against top Juco competition. Meramec has yet to be swept in a local doubleheader.

"Our pitching's there," said sophomore center fielder **Dan Healy** (CBC), defense needs to improve, we need less errors, and our offense really needs to break out like we did against JeffCo in the seventh inning. If that all comes together, I can't see teams beating us."

Several bright spots have helped the team to its winning record, like freshman pitchers **David Birkby** (Parkway West), and **Cory Cowsert** (Pacific.) Birkby, after a year off from arm surgery in '06, is 3-0. Cowsert is 2-0 in relief already, the most recent win against St. Charles College Mar. 27.

"I wasn't the greatest," said Cowsert in reference to the stint vs. St. Charles. "I put the ball where I needed to, the defense made some plays, and it worked out."

The Meramec uniform has also worked out for freshman hurler **Jake Morgan** (Mehlville), a crafty lefthander who has quickly turned into a big game starter with his mound tenacity. He is tied with Birkby for most wins with three, and sports a respectable 3.76 ERA.

"The pick up of Jake Morgan has been an inspiration," said coach Dattoli. "He is the heart and soul of this pitching staff. He goes out and wants the ball every single time."

Sophomore captain pitcher **Jordan Buck** (Pacific) has also earned accolades from Dattoli, serving as both a spot starter and a closer out of the bullpen.

"He's a very durable kid, he's got a lot of innings in him and he takes good care of himself," said Dattoli. "He and Jake Morgan are probably the two hardest working kids on the pitching staff and Brad Bichel's right there with them."

Sophomore captain **Brad Bichel** (St. Charles), a lefty, has had some baffling outings this season with a lack of velocity on his usually blazing pitches. He plans to shut his arm down for a couple weeks and go from there, hoping to be back in form in mid-April for the stretch run.

Among hitters, Vangel is leading in average at a .442 clip, with Peterson (.390) and third baseman **Jon Wilson** (St. Charles) at .373 right behind him. Wilson leads in RBI's with 14.

The Magic head into the heavy conference and Region XVI portion of their schedule, with lots of baseball and games that count heavily toward the post season. The emotional uplift courtesy of Jefferson couldn't come at a better time.

"We showed some energy and emotion which we've been lacking all season," said Bichel. "It got us going - it gave us momentum for the rest of the season."

### **11<sup>th</sup> Annual Hall Of Fame Banquet Slated For Apr. 9**

The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Magic Hall Of Fame induction dinner will unfold Monday, Apr. 9 at 6:30 at the Southwest Holiday Inn on S. Kirkwood Road. 2007 inductees will be soccer/softball standout **Glennis Donnelly**, softball star **Linda Meng-McQueen**, and baseball pitcher **T.J. Mathews**.

Donnelly recently graduated from the Police Academy in Mesa, Arizona and is pursuing a career in law enforcement. Meng-McQueen has been a longtime coach at Lutheran South High School. And, T.J. Mathews recently concluded a major league baseball career that included two stints with the St. Louis Cardinals. The first stop in St. Louis ended abruptly in mid-season 1997 when he was traded to Oakland to bring Mark McGwire to the Cardinals.

For ticket information, contact Diane Keith at 314-984-7398.

### **Cheerleading Squad Hosts April Camp, Dance Clinic**

The cheerleading team, under coach **Sandy Yanko**, will host separate cheerleading and dance camps for high school and grade school students in April. The high school cheerleading camp Apr. 21 will feature a technique review for motions and jumps, six chants, one cheer, and an eight, 8 count dance. The grade school clinic will be on Apr. 28.

Discipline, fundraising, and team building activities will also be shared.

### **Basketball's Jackson Heads To Texas All-Star Event**

Sophomore **Alex Jackson's** (Ladue) season isn't over yet. The lanky forward has been selected for a national all-star team that will play Apr. 21 in Kilgore, Texas. Jackson was one of only 10 Juco Division II players selected nationally.

The game, in just its second year, features 20 of the top junior college Division I players, and ten each from Divisions II and III.

Jackson was the Magic's leading scorer and rebounded this past season with 13 points and nine boards per game. He led the Magic to a 21-10 record.