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News Release

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Lady Cougars hungry for conference success in 2014

KOKOMO, Ind. — The Indiana University Kokomo volleyball team sets its sights on a conference championship in 2014, with a new class of recruits adding versatility and athleticism to a team that succeeded beyond expectations in 2013.



The Lady Cougars open the season Saturday, August 16, in Fort Wayne, against University of St. Francis. The home season kicks off at 7 p.m. Tuesday, August 19, with a game versus Judson College.

“We proved last year we can compete in the conference. This year, our goal is winning conference,” said Coach Heather Hayes. “We’re looking at how we can expand from last year’s success, and build off that.”

That effort began with recruiting, made easier this year by the previous season’s 28-11 record and finish near the top of the Kentucky Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (KIAC).

“It was easier to lead with our success, which caught people’s attention,” she said. “I feel pretty fortunate to find the core group we have so early.”

The six new recruits include Alexis Brickner (Wabash/Southwood HS), Casey Colgate (Indianapolis/Lutheran HS); Natalie Heaton (Muncie/Wes-Del HS), Maddison Taylor (Nashville/Brown County HS), Lindi Thomas (Parker City/Wapahani HS), and Elyse Younger (Fishers/Fishers HS).

“Our new players give us additional athleticism, which brings up the level of competitiveness at practice,” Hayes said. “I wanted to bring in middle hitters in particular, which was our main hole to fill.”

She expects the eight veterans player to provide leadership for the new recruits, and to help them become part of the team.

“Our returning players will need to make sure they reach out to our new players, to build the team chemistry again,” she said. “I expect them to be leaders not just on the court, but in the classroom, helping our new players adjust not only to being college athletes, but college students.”

Leading the team is Lael Larrick (Denver/North Miami HS), the only player who has been with the team all four seasons.

“She is truly a natural born leader, and may be one of the hardest-working players I have ever coached,” Hayes said. “She has worked very hard to help guide the program to where it is today.”

Also returning is Micayla Speidel (Columbus/Columbus East), who won Freshman of the Year honors from both the KIAC and the American Volleyball Coaches Association Northeast Region.

“Micayla is a dynamic player, and we look for her to do great things again this season,” Hayes said.

Other veteran players include Rachel Allen (Lizton/Tri-West HS); Kaley Harness (LaFontaine/Southwood HS), who was in the top 15 in the country in serves as a freshman; Cortney Hanson (Logansport/Pioneer HS), who was second team all conference; Kaitlyn Emery (Frankfort/Frankfort HS), Kaleigh Ensley (Fort Wayne/Snider HS), and Keeana Walton (Peru/Maconaquah HS).

To prepare for the conference tournament, the team scheduled games against competitive teams, Hayes said. They’re not playing as many games, but face tougher competition.

“We beefed up our schedule to compete against the strongest teams in our conference,” she said. “We’re only playing 31 games this year, but we’re playing harder teams. Our record will look different, but it will make us a better team when the tournament begins, and that’s what we want.”

Home games, in bold, are played in the Cougar Gym.

Games include:

- August 16: University of Saint Francis, Fort Wayne
- **7p.m. August 19: Judson College (New Student Night)**
- August 22-23: Grace College Invitational, Winona Lake
- 7 p.m. August 27: At Marion University, Indianapolis
- **7p.m. August 29: Goshen College**
- 7 p.m. September 3: At Indiana University Northwest
- September 6: Rio Grande Tri, Rio Grande, Ohio
- **7 p.m. September 11: Indiana University East (Military Appreciation Night)**
- **1 p.m. September 13: Asbury University**
- **5 p.m. September 13: Calumet College of St. Joseph**
- 7 p.m. September 19: At Point Park University, Pittsburgh
- 12 p.m. September 20: At Carlow College, Pittsburgh
- **7 p.m. September 24: Purdue University Calumet**
- 2 p.m. September 27: At Purdue University North Central, Westville
- **7 p.m. September 30: Indiana University Southeast**
- 2 p.m. October 4: At Brescia University, Owensboro, Ky.
- 4 p.m. October 4: At Cincinnati Christian University, Owensboro, Ky.
- **7 p.m. October 10: University of Saint Francis**
- **1 p.m. October 11: Midway College**
- **5 p.m. October 11: Indiana University Northwest**
- October 17-18: Calumet College Invitational, Whiting
- 12 p.m. October 25: At Asbury University, Wilmore, Ky.
- 2 p.m. October 25: At Alice Lloyd College, Wilmore, Ky.
- **2 p.m. November 1: Purdue University North Central**
- **7 p.m. November 5: Taylor University**
- November 14-15: KIAC Tournament, Point Park University, Pittsburgh

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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