



By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

The 2013 Longhorn softball team is sporting some of the biggest player numbers since softball started at Chase County in 2000.

Coach Denise Smith and Asst. Coach Jason Speck have 20 girls on the roster this year, and are preparing for the season opener next week, Tuesday, Aug. 27.

They will travel to Southern Valley for the 3 p.m. opener that also includes Blue Hill.

It will be a busy first week, when they return to Southern Valley on Thursday, Aug. 29, for another triangular with SV and Grand Island CC.

Saturday, Aug. 31, will be their home opener, when Perry, Okla., returns for a varsity contest at 10 a.m. Wray, Colo., is also scheduled to be in Imperial that day to play Perry after the Chase County game.

With six seniors on the team, in addition to six freshmen, three sophomores and five juniors, depth is going to be a big positive this year, Smith said.

“This is huge for us to have these numbers,” Smith said.

The team will now have some “cushion” down the road if injuries, sickness or other things happen to reduce numbers able to play, she added.

That hasn’t been the case in recent years, when at times, the team was down to just nine or 10 late in the season.

Smith said she’s especially excited to see the big freshman numbers, five of whom played competitively this summer on the Imperial junior softball team, which was undefeated until the tournament championship game. Most of the upperclassmen also played on the undefeated senior softball team this summer, Smith noted.

One of the strongest positions on the Longhorn team is expected to be on the pitcher’s mound.

Returning starter Anna Bauerle is back, who pitched nearly all of the team’s varsity games last year. Smith said seven others have experience on the mound, as well, including two from the freshman class.

The coaches are still working at deciding starters at other positions, but Smith said they have a lot of girls who can play more than one position for the Longhorns.

The 2013 schedule will have 30 varsity games prior to the post-season and six to seven for the JVs.

The varsity games are up slightly from 28 last year with the addition of a triangular in Chadron on Oct. 5 to include Alliance. That location will alternate between the three teams each year, with Chase County slated to host it in 2014.

This year’s squad features three sets of sisters, Smith noted, which is unusual. They include Anna and Emma Bauerle, Blair and Jessica Hartman and Faith and Destiny Reinke.

Members of the Longhorn team, listed by class, are:

Seniors—Anna Bauerle, Ally Vrbas, Abbi Vetter, Blair Hartman, Cassie Burpo, Jodi Koellner.

Juniors—Emma Bauerle, Jessica Hartman, Claire Kuenze, Faith Reinke, Emma Mollendor.

Sophomores—Shelby Bigham, Jasmine Laird, Becca Huicochea.

Freshmen—Brittanie Bengel, Josie Peterson, Katelyn Wheeler, Brittany Simeon, Sarah Allen, Destiny Reinke.