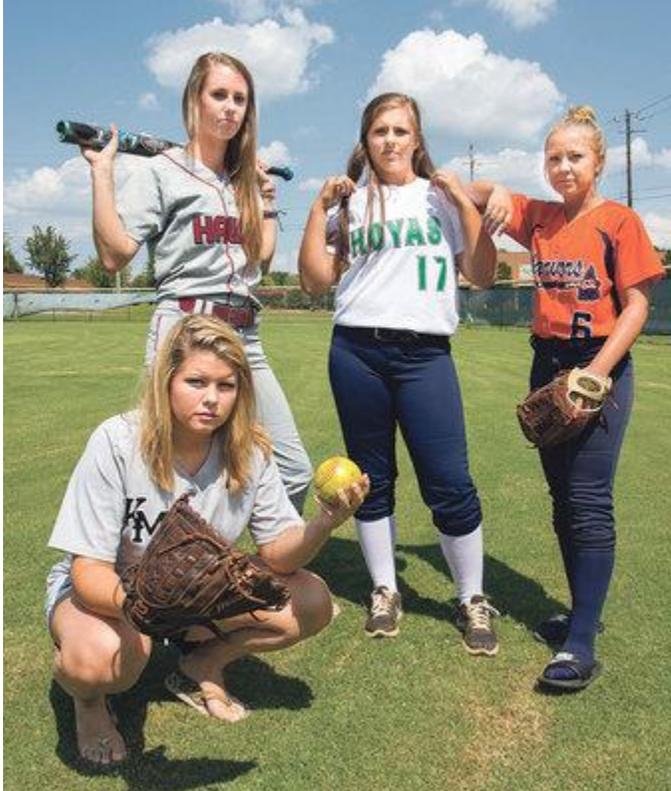


Region 4AAAAAA softball teams set to lead charge again

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August 07, 2014 12:13 AM | 2740 views | 0 | 13 | | |



Region 4AAAAAA teams have been consistent visitors to Columbus, and this year should be no different, with the help of Kennesaw Mountain's Kathryn Woody (kneeling), Hillgrove's Abby Evans, Harrison's Abby Broome and North Cobb's Bryanna Vazquez.

Staff photo by Jeff Stanton

If a Cobb County team wins another state softball championship, it could very well come from a team in Region 4AAAAAA.

Gwinnett County schools have won each of the last seven softball championships in the state's highest classification, but teams from Region 4AAAAAA have been in the mix for the title as well. Harrison was the Class AAAAA runner-up in 2010.

The region then upped the ante, sending three teams to the elite eight in Columbus in 2011, '12 and '13 with Kennesaw Mountain finishing as the runner-up in 2012 and Harrison duplicating the feat last season.

North Cobb, Hillgrove and Kennesaw Mountain reached the elite eight in 2011, while Hillgrove, Kennesaw Mountain and Harrison have been the past two years.

"I think the key, recently, for the region has been consistency, good coaching and having good players," said Kennesaw Mountain coach Lisa Chapman, who is entering her 15th season at the helm. "I've been in this region for several years, and the high school

programs put a lot of pride into building winning teams.”

Strong junior varsity and travel programs have also played a key role in the postseason success of the region’s teams.

“The talent pool we draw from is big,” said Harrison coach Matt Jones, who is entering his third season at the helm, following six years as an assistant. “There are so many good players in the area, and a lot of them play travel ball.

“That’s a big component. These girls play almost year-round, and by the time they get to us, all we have to do is refine their talents instead of having to build from scratch. They already have all the tools. We just develop them.”

The top teams of Region 4AAAAAA each have strong talent back from 2013. Harrison returns catcher Abby Broome and pitcher/second baseman Brooke Taylor, while Hillgrove brings back several returning starters, including pitcher Abby Evans and center fielder Ashley Allen.

Kennesaw Mountain has pitcher Kathryn Woody and outfielder Becky Granneman returning, while North Cobb returns infielder Bryanna Vazquez and outfielder Casey Page.

“It’s a difficult region because it doesn’t matter who you beat any day,” Evans said. “They can come back and beat you the next day.

“We all have the key components to winning, like hitting, playing good defense and pitching. We all lose good players to graduation, but the young players step up and fill those shoes.”

The teams in Region 4AAAAAA, which now includes North Paulding, will be counting on their youthful talent and vast experience to help their squad get to the postseason.

“There are a lot of Division I-caliber athletes in the region,” Vazquez said. “There’s lots of great competition, and we play at a high level.”

While Region 4AAAAAA will likely see the same four teams reach the postseason this year, region realignment could help teams like South Cobb and Campbell make the playoffs out of their new home in Region 3AAAAAA, along with East Coweta and Newnan.

South Cobb returns a strong roster that includes catcher Becky Collins, shortstop Asia Moore and third baseman Terilyn Harris, while Campbell brings back nine varsity players, including shortstop Sierra Logan and outfielder Hannah Reyes.

Region 5AAAAAA newcomer Pope should challenge last year’s champion, Lassiter, for the title this year. The Lady Greyhounds return Class AAAAA state pitcher of the year Kelly Barnhill and Megan Metzinger, while the Lady Trojans bring back pitcher Brianna Michaud and shortstop Kelly Sinclair.

Allatoona should once again be a threat in Region 5AAAAA behind outfielder Morgan

Kazerooni and pitcher Makenzie Colwart.

Cambridge, Creekview and Sequoyah will likely occupy three of the four spots from the 14-team Region 7AAAAA, leaving Kell and Sprayberry battling for the fourth spot.

The private-school power ratings system in Class A hasn't been kind in recent years to Walker, Whitefield Academy, North Cobb Christian and Mount Paran Christian. With numbers down, Whitefield will not field a team this season.

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