

Del Norte's first ASA softball team heads to Sonoma

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Del Norte County has its first official ASA (Amateur Softball Association) softball team ever. Although several local players have participated on various ASA teams based in Brookings or Humboldt County throughout the years, the NorCal Swat is the first official ASA team comprised entirely of Del Norte players and based in Del Norte County.

The NorCal Swat formed an 8 and under team at the beginning of the summer and have been regulars on the diamond for the last two months.

"All these girls played for the local Little League and then we just pulled them at the end of that season and started practicing," said head coach Ashlee Coopman. "We have been going ever since."

Coopman said the team was formed quickly at the end of the Del Norte Little League season after they learned of an opportunity for the girls to play some extra games.

“Someone from Humboldt County reached out and said that they had a league down there and were looking for some teams to play,” Coopman said. “So the president of Del Norte Little League, Beau Smith, reached out to me and said, ‘Why don’t you put a team together.’ So we started working on that and had a great turnout.

“The parents are awesome and the kids love it. So we are just looking to build on that and build a filter system for our own programs and just keep feeding into them instead of having to go elsewhere for these girls to get some time in.”

Although the 8 and under age group is old enough to participate in Little League during the season, there is no District or State tournaments for an All Star team of that age. That allowed the 8 and under team to form and start practicing while many of the older girls were working towards the Little League postseason.

Josephine Antonetti said she was invited to play on the team and she jumped at the opportunity.

“I like baseball, so I said, ‘Sure I want to,’” she said. “I like it here because I get to catch a lot and they help us. It is really helpful.”

Both Del Norte’s 8-10 and 10-12 softball all star teams won their respective district tournaments and advanced to state this year, but 8-10 coach John Horner and 10-12 coach Meagan Curtis both said the lack of tournament experience was difficult for their teams to overcome in state competition.

Taylor Horner was the only 8-year-old on the 8-10 All Star team this year. She said her father, who coached the all star team, convinced her to play with the NorCal Swat.

“I was in All Stars and my dad said, ‘Why don’t you go to a softball team that is actually your age?’ I was like, ‘Sure,’” she said. “He said it will be more fun, so I said, ‘OK, I’ll do it.’”

Although the NorCal Swat is currently solely a single 8 and under team, they are hoping to expand to include some of the older girls as early as next summer.

“This year we just had to work on getting our registration as an individual rec team,” Coopman said. “Next year we will have to set up our nonprofit organization, get a board going, and get a whole league going. So there is quite a bit of work to do between now and then. But this year we just got our team registered individually with ASA and started practicing.”

Coopman said the NorCal Swat have headed to Humboldt to play double headers twice throughout the summer, including a double header against a 10 and under team. They plan on wrapping up their season this weekend with the first ever tournament experience for all of the girls in Santa Rosa this weekend.

“I am just looking forward to see the girls play, and showing all the hard work that they have put in,” Coopman said. “They are stoked. So we just want to get them into some real tournament-style play, get to see

what they can do, and show them another side of softball that they don't see here."

The NorCal Swat will start the tournament on Saturday where they have been placed into a pool of four teams. The Swat will play each of the other teams on Saturday, before wrapping up the weekend with single elimination bracket play on Sunday.

Both Antonetti and Cambria Galindo said they are most looking forward to, "having a good time and winning the game."

Coopman said that none of the teams that the Swat have played in Humboldt will be at the tournament in Sonoma County, so it will be an entirely new experience for the girls.

"As far as competition we have not seen any of the other teams, so we are kind of going in blind sided," Coopman said.

No matter how the team fares in its first tournament, Coopman said she has been impressed with all the work the players have put in throughout the summer.

"Their dedication really stands out," Coopman said. "They have spent all summer here, and it has been a hot one. They are down here from 4 to 6 every single night practicing. They have really shown commitment and have really put their all into being here, going to the tournament, and building a foundation for themselves. At this age, for the girls to show that commitment and dedication is pretty awesome to see out of such a young group of kids."