

https://www.bryantimes.com/bryan_times/take-2-area-second-year-spring-coaches-looking-forward-to-making-debuts/article_5859fd87-ef29-55b2-a5dc-5079959a0ec4.html

Take 2: Area second-year spring coaches looking forward to making debuts

By MICHAEL BURWELL sportseditor@bryantimes.com

Mar 25, 2021





Bryan softball coach Samantha Fowls (right) and assistant coach Brian Arnold take stats during the Golden Bears' scrimmage against Perrysburg on Monday at Recreation Park.

Photo by Michael Burwell

Bryan softball's Samantha Fowls and Edgerton baseball's Michael Gilliland will be getting a second chance of being a first-year head coach. Or, they will be entering their second year with an unbeaten — and winless — record.

Whichever way they look at it, Fowls and Gilliland are among several area leaders in a unique situation of being second-year coaches without a game or meet under their belt after the 2020 OHSAA spring sports season was initially postponed and eventually canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's kind of one of those feelings where you look at it and you just kind of expect the worst every day," Gilliland said. "But thankfully, I think everything's in place with all the protocols and everything that we're going to get to play some baseball this year, so that's a good thing."

THE BRYAN TIMES
BABY
EDITION

Deadline to enter is Feb. 3
Open to all babies born in 2021
no matter where you live

[Click Here to Submit Your Photo](#)

Lucy Mae Conner
Mark & Lisa Conner
Bryan, OH
9-24-21

Fowls, Gilliland, Ken Ciolek (Bryan boys track and field coach) and Garret Gleckler (Bryan girls track and field coach) are each entering their second year leading their respective programs. They are excited to get started with the regular season, which begins Saturday for softball, baseball and track and field teams across Ohio.

“I’m pumped,” said Gilliland, a 2015 Napoleon High School graduate who also played baseball for Defiance College. “I’m excited on my own, so I can only imagine how much the kids are excited because none of our kids got to play in the summer, so it’s been about a year and a half since any of them have played baseball.

“You can kind of see how much they missed it with the amount of time they spend after practice working on stuff outside of that allotted time, which is really good to see just because I think they just missed playing. As much as I missed coaching, I feel more excited for them than myself.”

It has been an interesting year for them and a challenging buildup to their coaching debuts.

In early March 2020, the OHSAA postponed the remaining winter sports tournaments and the start of the spring sports season. A no-contact period between coaches and players for all sports was initiated as well, and in late April, the OHSAA canceled the remaining winter sports tournaments and the spring sports campaign.

The coaches got very little practice time in with their squads.

“It’s weird because I was just thinking, I almost consider this my first year just because last year we had some practice in but never obviously got to a game or scrimmage or anything,” Fowls said. “It’s just kind of like starting over for me. I just never really even got settled in last year.”

Added Gilliland: “It seemed like because we had a long basketball run last year (Edgerton boys basketball reached the 2020 Division IV district semifinal on March 3), we got everybody back finally for about a week then that Friday (March 13) is when everything got shut down, so we kind of started to get into everything on a deeper level, I guess so to speak, with everybody there.

“Then it was over before it even started.”

The coaches, however, had a big benefit of getting to know some of their players through school, summer ball or other sports.

Fowls, a 2014 Maumee High School graduate, was an assistant softball coach at Bryan in 2019 and coached the 14-under team for the Bryan Girls Softball Association in the summer.

“I was an assistant coach my first year and got to know the girls pretty well,” Fowls said. “(Bryan athletic director and former softball coach) Chad (Savage) introduced me to them early on and got to coach all offseason with him and get to kind of know his style of coaching as well as adding my own stuff, too.

“I’ve been watching these seniors for the past two years and I know they’re just kind of fired up and ready to go. Definitely built some strong relationships with them.”

Gilliland is in his second year as the health/physical education teacher at Edgerton, and that has been important in getting to see his players as well.

“I’ve been able to kind of build a relationship more so on a deeper level with kids rather than them kind of just feeling me out and getting to know me,” Gilliland said. “So I’ve got to know them a lot better and see them play all their sports throughout the school year here, so it’s been good just building those relationships that are important for success as a team.”

For Ciolek, who coached Defiance College’s track and field teams from 2014-2019, being in touch with his athletes during indoor track helped immensely.

“The one nice thing that we were able to do is we implemented indoor track last year, so we had some athletes that were able to go on and be state medalists indoors,” Ciolek said. “But even the kids that didn’t compete were able to come in and practice a little bit and kind of get a feel for what the coaches’ expectations were, how we set up practices and get to hang out with each other if they weren’t in another sport.

"I would say that was a huge attribute to us of being able to do that. The other nice thing too is these kids, they're so active in so many other sports that they have that camaraderie already and have that experience of winning coming from these winning programs from the fall and the winter that it's nice just to kind of be able to blend that a little bit into the spring."

Bryan's softball team has had multiple scrimmages already this preseason and is scheduled to start the regular season against Maumee at 1 p.m. Saturday at Recreation Park. The Golden Bears' track and field teams have their first meet 4:30 p.m. Tuesday at Defiance, while Edgerton's baseball squad will open with a home game Saturday morning.

With how much uncertainty there was a year ago, the coaches will take nothing for granted this year.

"We had about five or six seniors last year that lost their last sport of baseball or even in the spring with track or anything like that," Gilliland said. "So it's kind of hit our guys."

"We talk a lot about how your playing clock is coming to an end and it can come to an end a lot quicker, so you can kind of use it as a teaching moment to talk about a newfound appreciation for high school athletics and your ability to play sports."