

# Danville softball team building toward better days ahead

BY MIKE MARSEE  
Contributing Writer

Progress on the softball diamond can be measured in any number of increments, but the most important measure for Whitney Cruver is the largest of them all: years.

Cruver is keenly interested in the day-to-day progress of the Danville team she coaches, but she's also keenly aware any real measure of success is still at least a year or two down the road.

So while the Lady Admirals celebrate their good days, their coach wants them to also build a foundation for better days to come.

"We're not focused just on game to game or this year," Cruver said. "I've already talked to them a number of times about what we do now and at the end of the season is going to carry into next season because hopefully we'll have everybody return next year."

Cruver needs every player she can get in her effort to reverse the fortunes of a program that has struggled for more than a decade.

The Lady Admirals barely had enough players to field a team last year, and they have only a few more this year and for the second straight season have a roster heavy with middle school players.

But they believe that will help them in coming seasons as they grow and improve together.

"I feel like we can get really good," seventh-grader Riley Foster, the team's primary pitcher, said. "(It's going to take) just hard work and more practice."

As for this season, Danville was 5-11 after losing to Somerset Christian 12-4 on Tuesday.

They were within two wins of their 2022 victory total, and they're certain they are a better team



Danville pitcher Riley Foster (4) throws to first base after fielding a ground ball as third baseman Aubree Caldwell looks on during the first inning Tuesday. Photo by Mike Marsee

than they were last year or even when the season began just over a month ago.

"We've improved a lot since the beginning of the season," Foster said.

Even in the loss to Somerset Christian, Cruver noted there were areas in which the Lady Admirals showed improvement.

"I don't think we really had too many errors, whereas last week we had a game where we had 11, so that's a huge improvement. And we're just getting better in the (batter's) box and having good at-bats," she said.

She said the determination of whether the Lady Admirals have a good day is based not on who they

play but on how they play.

"The good days depend on who decides to show up. We are young, and we're struggling with errors and strikeouts," Cruver said.

Danville has struggled since 2012, the final season of an 11-year run under coach Jerry Perry in which it won four district titles and reached the regional semifinals five times.

The Lady Admirals haven't won more than 10 games and haven't won a postseason game since then. They had six coaches in nine seasons before Cruver, a hall of fame pitcher at both her Ohio high school and the University of the Cumberlands, took over the program in October 2022.

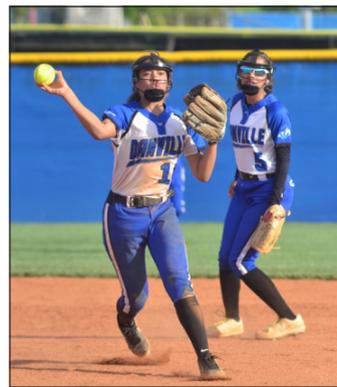
Cruver had only nine or 10 players last season, and this year there are 13, six of whom are in middle school.

"That is helpful for our future because they're going to be playing together for so many years," she said.

She began practice in November, much earlier than usual, and she said the work they put in during the winter was encouraging.

Junior Jazelynn Doneghy, the only upperclassman on the roster, said she likes the direction the team has taken.

"I feel like we're more confident this year, (playing with) more energy and just more as a team in



Danville shortstop Abree Gannos throws to first base in an attempt to complete a double play as second baseman Jazelynn Doneghy looks on during the second inning Tuesday. Photo by Mike Marsee

general," Doneghy said. "We all get along, we're friends and there's no drama, and that really helps."

Foster is the team's top offensive player with a .538 batting average, eight doubles, eight RBIs and 12 stolen bases through 16 games. Sophomore Dashannica Jones is hitting .400 with five doubles and 12 RBIs and Doneghy is hitting .383 with six doubles and nine RBIs.

Cruver's goals for the remainder of this season are for Danville to pick up as many as five more wins and to be in position to win a game in the five-team 45th District Tournament.

There will likely still be difficult days between now and then - Danville has three mercy-rule wins but also has seven mercy-rule losses - but the coach said a strong finish to this season will give them momentum heading into next year and beyond as they continue to try to rebuild their program.

"I have a lot of hope in them," Cruver said.

## Mercer's Drakeford to play in Kentucky-Indiana All-Star game

### NEWS REPORT

Anna Drakeford of Mercer County was named to the Kentucky All-Stars for the annual Kentucky-Indiana basketball series.

Drakeford is one of 12 players chosen for the Kentucky girls squad that will play the Indiana stars June 7 at Lexington Catholic High School in Lexington and June 8 at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.

Drakeford, a 5-8 senior who signed with Thomas More University earlier

this year, ranked first in the 12th Region and fourth in the state in scoring this season at 26.0 points per game. She shot 54 percent from the field and 75 percent from the free throw line and averaged 6.3 rebounds per game.

She broke the Lady Titans' single-season assists record and leaves ranked No. 2 in the program in career scoring.

Indiana leads Kentucky in the girls series 53-41, and the two teams split last season's games.



Anna Drakeford (4) of Mercer County was named to the Kentucky All-Stars for the annual Kentucky-Indiana All-Star games in June. Photo by Mike Marsee

## Former Boyle player Jackson Smith enters transfer portal

BY LARRY VAUGHT  
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Kentucky has always been Jackson Smith's dream school and probably always will be. However, the former Boyle County placekicker/punter has put his name into the transfer portal after spending two years with the Wildcats.

Jackson's social media post announcing his transfer said he was "appreciative" of his two years but is looking forward to having an "opportunity to help a special teams unit" as a punter, kick off specialist, kicker or holder.

He was ranked as the top kicker/punter in the 2022 recruiting class by ProKicker.com and was a three-time national specialist of the year by Pro-Kicker.com. He made 72 of 78 extra points his senior year and went 7-for-9 on field goals. He had 68 touchbacks on kickoffs. Boyle seldom punted



Jackson Smith. Photo by Vicky Graff

during its state championship season but when it did he averaged 42.1 yards per kick.

Smith had a lot of college options but never really considered any school except Kentucky. His father, Andy, played three years at UK and was an all-SEC punter in 1999 when he averaged 42.7 yards per try.

Jackson Smith was redshirted in 2022 and then did not get an opportunity to kick in 2023. His transfer decision was not a surprise because current special

teams coach Jay Boulware did not recruit him and it has seemed obvious he does not fit the style of kicker Boulware prefers.

"We are both kind of disappointed in that it is the only place he ever wanted to go," said Andy Smith.

Transfer kicker Alex Raynor was superb on field goals and extra points last year and returned this season. Punter Wilson Berry still has two years of eligibility remaining.

"The coaches just made

it pretty clear to Jackson it would be a little bit more time before he would get his chance. He has been there two years and he wants an opportunity now," Andy Smith said. "His leaving was kind of mutual. He could have stayed but it looked like more of the same thing and he wants an opportunity to kick."

"He's very appreciative of his time at Kentucky. He wants to focus on punting and kicking off. He's had a lot of schools reach out knowing he still has three years left."

Three of the first schools to reach out were Appalachian State, Western Kentucky and West Virginia. By Tuesday afternoon, seven other schools had also contacted him. Andy Smith started his collegiate career at Western, and West Virginia is coached by former Boyle County standout Neal Brown.

Jackson Smith cannot transfer to another SEC school and be eligible for the fall semester due to the

spring transfer protocols. "Ideally he would like to be at this new school before June workouts start and be ready to work all summer and get ready for the season," Andy Smith said.

Jackson Smith was redshirted in 2022 but was injured in spring practice of 2023. He needed therapy and treatment almost until the time the 2023 preseason camp opened. With the arrival of Boulware, he went from being a kicker like he was in 2022 to punter.

"Boulware has a different scheme than the previous special teams coach and focuses primarily on hand to foot time and getting the ball off," Andy Smith said. "Jackson can do the roll out and all the Aussie stuff but that is not the scheme they want to run even with Wilson, who is Australian."

Andy Smith said his son feels like he let "people down" by putting his name in the transfer portal. However, in today's

college football world, it's about finding the right opportunity. Remember quarterback Beau Allen started at UK, transferred and is now back at UK for his final season as Brock Vandagriff's backup.

"It is big business. The portal has changed the landscape of college athletics," Andy Smith said. "Gone are the days of developing and working your way up. Schools can benefit from the change. Look at the last three quarterbacks at Kentucky. They were all high level transfers who came here to make money and go to the NFL. It's great from a fan standpoint but it can put players in different positions."

"We are appreciative of his time at Kentucky. It was a perfect setup except for not playing. The reality is he does not want to sit another year and he was not recruited by the current special teams coaches and just wants to go where he can help somebody win."