

## Baby Bayside looking at bright future, this year and beyond

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To call it a youth movement would be an understatement. If you log onto PSAL.org and look at Bayside's softball roster, you might do a double take and think you clicked on "junior varsity."

The Commodores have eight freshmen this year – more than any other grade level. And all of them, coach Steve Piorkowski, have potential to do big things in the coming months and years.

"The sky's the limit," Piorkowski said. "I've never had so many freshmen on a team. I've never had so many players like this before. The future looks real, real good."

The coach has been so committed to his youngsters that he pulled aside seniors Cheska Mauban and Joey Chan, both of whom play basketball for him, and asked them if they were truly dedicated to softball. Mauban, who has a leadership scholarship to Babson, wouldn't have been able to make practices or games on Tuesdays due to other obligations and Piorkowski was unsure of Chan's devotion to softball.

"As good as Cheska and Joey are, these kids aren't far behind," he said. "I think they're gonna be replaced. That could be a risky gamble, but I want kids that really want to play all the time."

Piorkowski will still be leaning on veterans like windmill Kaitlyn Klein, who should be cleared this week after offseason hernia surgery. Soribel Paulino at catcher, Gloria Yi at first base and Victoria Yip at third will all be depended upon to keep Bayside above water while the freshmen gain more seasoning.

"They have to do well," Piorkowski said. "They're seniors. ... If the seniors do their job and do it well, we're gonna have a real good season."

Freshman twin sisters Heidi and Emily Gomez, who are both strong and 5-foot-9, have been filling in for Klein. Freshman Tara Bernstein is going to be Bayside's starting shortstop and leadoff hitter. Piorkowski couldn't recall the last time – if ever – that he had a ninth grader at short to start the season.

"She's very fast, very quick," he said. "She's a good player, has good softball IQ. She's just gonna get better and better. Already she's showing signs of being a very good player."

There are more like her, most of whom are very athletic and just need some additional polish to be contributing players. Piorkowski expects to see Taylor Moy, Lauren Stanton, Jacqueline Perno and Cortney Hafkin to all see playing time this season. And he's not worried, because in terms of raw talent the neophytes are not far off some of his past teams.

"The water level is going to be close to last year," he said.

Bayside lost a division tiebreaker to Cardozo last year and advanced to the PSAL Class A quarterfinals. The Commodores have been a mainstay in the final eight or final four for the better part of a decade. Could this be the group that, a year or two down the line, gets them to the Promised Land? Too soon to tell, Piorkowski said.

"Right now it's potential and promise," he said.

Quite a bit of it.

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