

# Softball battery features fresh faces

## Catcher Natalie Ysais to help lead young staff

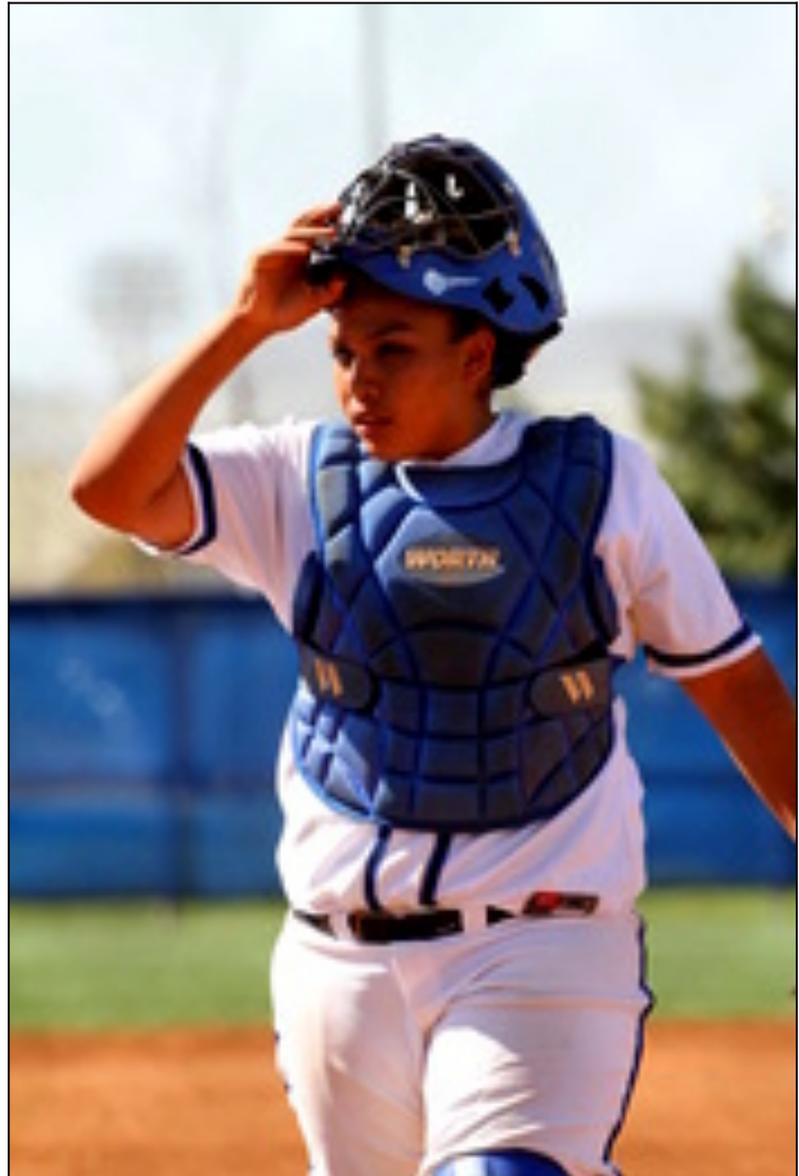
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### **MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -**

The Middle Tennessee softball pitching and catching staffs might be the most unknown quantity entering the 2011 campaign. Twenty-game winner Lindsey Vander Lugt's graduation leaves a large vacancy that the current hurler-corps will be tasked with filling.

Current staff comprises of returners Caty Jutson and Janele Robinson in addition to freshmen Jordyn Fisherback and Shelby Stinnett.

Catcher Natalie Ysais, the most experienced member of the Blue Raider battery will be the group's refuge of comfort and stability. Ysais caught all 55 games last season, and the pitchers are very familiar with her receiving ability. Junior Abbey Sanders and transfer Kelsey Woodruff will take the pressure Ysais in backup capacities.



"We have a young staff, but they will be counted to produce for this team," head coach Sue Nevar said. "Natalie did a great job for us last year at catcher and she will be major help for us."

In the circle, Jutson battled through a tough sophomore season and had trouble finding consistency do in large part to a nagging knee injury. Appearing in just 27.1 innings of work, the Phoenix, Ariz., native posted a 6.33 ERA with a seven strikeouts. A pitcher who relies on movement more than power, Jutson must find a way to get outs to work as an important member of the staff. She will also be used as a designated player and pinch-hitter.

"We are looking for Caty to rebound from last season where she was injured most of the year," pitching coach Megan Rhodes Smith said. "Day in and day out I have felt like she has done a lot of work trying to figure out what she needs to do be successful."

Janele Robinson tallied two wins in 2010. With an ERA of 4.80 and 37 strikeouts in 77.1 innings of work, Robinson showed flashes of a strong pitcher in her freshman campaign. Like Jutson, however, she must also be more consistent from start-to-start. In the off-season, she worked on improving her power and screwball movement.

"Janele's velocity and movement have really improved since I've been here," Smith said. "Her main focus is doing what she can do and not trying to win the game in a single pitch."

Freshman Jordyn Fisherback's early growth and potential has Nevar excited. With an impressive high school resume, including six perfect-games, 16 no-hitters and over 900 strikeouts, Fisherback has proven she can dominate in the high school stage, but must find a way translate her success to the collegiate game. If the Greenville, Ohio, native can control her hard-throwing arm and get batters out, she will become a mainstay for the team.

"We throw everything, but the kitchen sink at our freshman," Nevar said. "They will take their lumps, but they must transition as quickly as position. We do not have four years for them to develop."

Fellow freshman Shelby Stinnett will serve primarily in a relief role. Like Fisherback, Stinnett comes to Middle Tennessee with heralded high school numbers and holds the TSSAA state records for inning pitched in a season (130.1), career strikeouts (1,400), and career wins (119). Stinnett can serve multiple roles including designated player and first baseman.

"Shelby rounds out the staff nicely," Smith said. "She will be our all around player to serve in different capacities from relief roles to a DP or even at first base. We are not going in with a set starter. It is very competitive and the freshmen are pushing the upper-classmen to continue to grow and pitch better. They are young in term of knowing game situations. They are working on being more pitchers and not robots in the circle."

Behind the plate, Ysais was one of the most important figures in the team's late-season Sun Belt Tournament run. Consistent batting and behind the plate, Ysais led the team in power-numbers with five homers, 27 RBIs and a .419 slugging percentage. In the field, the Yurupa, Calif., native had only five past balls and two throwing errors all last year.

Nevar said, "Natalie's role is to lead the team from behind the plate. She has developed into a very good communicator. She has really anchored the staff and knows how to put these pitchers at ease."

Newcomer, Kelsey Woodruff, will help take some of the load off Ysais. A junior-transfer from Motlow State, Woodruff was a pitcher's nightmare in 2010, stroking 56 hits for a .394 average with four doubles, two triples, 15 homeruns and 54 RBIs. She will also be used as a designated-hitter and pinch-hitter when not backing up Ysais.

Abbey Sanders rounds out the team's catching corp. Sanders saw limited action in 2010, but Nevar feels she has the ability to produced timely hits in a pinch situations and challenge Woodruff for the backup role.

The team opens 2011 competition on Sunday as the play host to the Murray State Racers. The first game of the doubleheader will begin at 1 p.m. Stay tuned to GoBlueRaiders.com and [twitter.com/MT\\_Softball](https://twitter.com/MT_Softball) all season for full-coverage and updates.

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