

Spring Sports Preview 2025



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THE BELTON  **JOURNAL**

Tigers will face new teams in district play this year

By Clay Whittington
The Belton Journal

Every season presents new problems, and that is one of Mark Krueger's favorite aspects.

With eight years of experience overseeing the program, Belton's head coach fully understands no two campaigns are alike at the high school level. Each season sees players plucked away by graduation, while others are added.

Sometimes, the turnover is accentuated toward one extreme or the other, but every schedule starts with a unique set of obstacles and opportunities, and Krueger embraces them.

"I am always excited for the start of the season with a new team and new challenges," he said. "It seems like every year is a little different based on the team, its returners and key positions to fill.

"So, all of that brings the excitement that comes with trying to find the right mix for our team."

Reese Rumfield, an outfielder, and pitcher Easton Drake are among the players the Tigers must replace, but filling the void takes time, and it is not infinite.

Belton's first of three tournaments before beginning District 16-5A competition against Lake Belton on March 28 was cancelled due to inclement weather

and freezing temperatures.

As a result, the Tigers were robbed of valuable chances to jell before every outcome begins to matter toward playoff aspirations.

"We have five returners who contributed to last year's team," Krueger said, "so that is always a good thing. We are still trying to find the right mix as far as lineup, positions, pitching rotations and so on.

"Losing our first tournament hurts us in that respect as we use those tournaments to prepare us, so I'm definitely looking forward to some great weather."

While there are multiple new faces in need of finding their niche, but some will not have any such issue.

The senior quintet of first baseman Jacob Quigley, second baseman Austin Wood, shortstop Gage Flores, outfielder Rayshaun Peoples and Cole Haisler was instrumental to Belton's playoff appearance.

Haisler was named the all-district pitcher of the year after helping Belton place second in the final standings with an 11-3 record.

Things have changed, though.

The Tigers' district now consists of Killeen Chaparral, Killeen Ellison, Waco and Waco University along with the Broncos.

"Our district will be competitive," Krueger said. "Most of our district teams have key players returning, so you can't have an off night. We have to pride ourselves on pitching and defense.

"We put an emphasis on those two things in practice every day, because having success in those two areas will keep us in every game we play."

In addition to being mechanically sound, Belton hopes to be mentally strong enough to withstand any obstacles that could derail it from obtaining its goals.

Again, however, time is of the

See **TIGERS BASEBALL**,

Page 5



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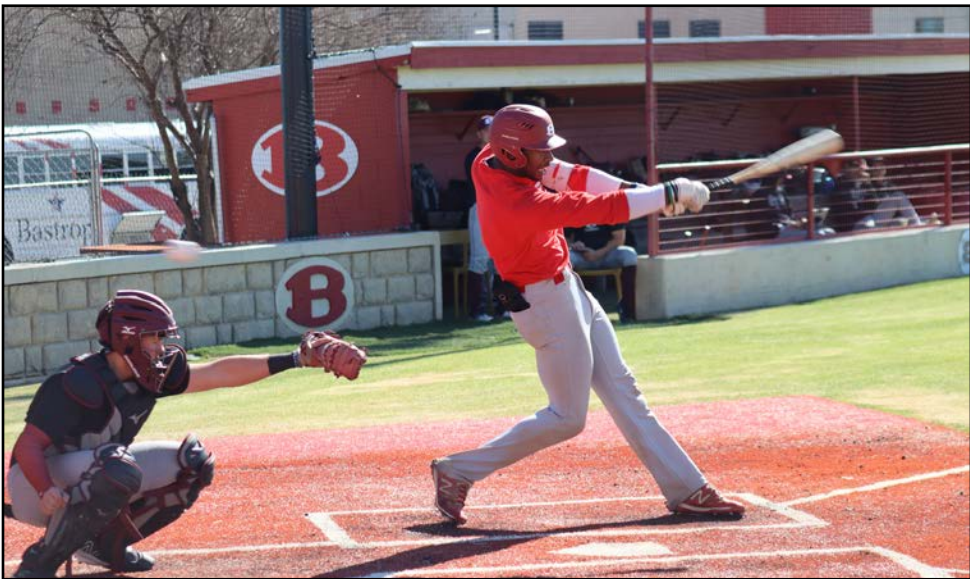
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Tigers Baseball - From Page 2

essence.

“Trying to put the right guys in the right positions will be what we will focus on during the next few weeks,” Krueger said. “We have several guys competing for positions, so that is a positive. “Competing in practice and in our tournaments will only make our team get better and more prepared for our district games.”



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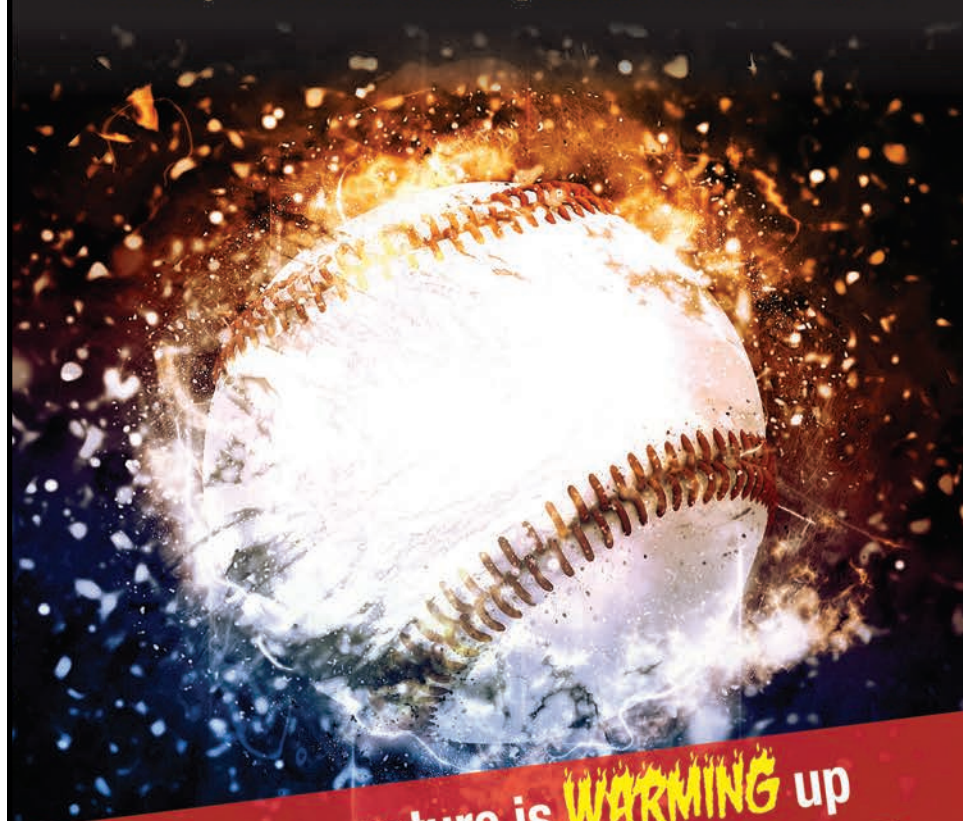
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Tiger Softball primed for success in 2025

By Tony Adams
The Belton Journal

The Belton Tigers finished third place in District 22-5A last season, had a 10-4 record, and 21-11 record overall. They dropped an 11-0 decision to two-time defending 5A state champion Montgomery Lake Creek. The Tigers are led by head coach Morgan Birkel in her second season and assisted by Ashley Hallmark and Trey Bledsoe.

Several key members of the team graduated and two have transferred. The cupboard is not bare by any means.

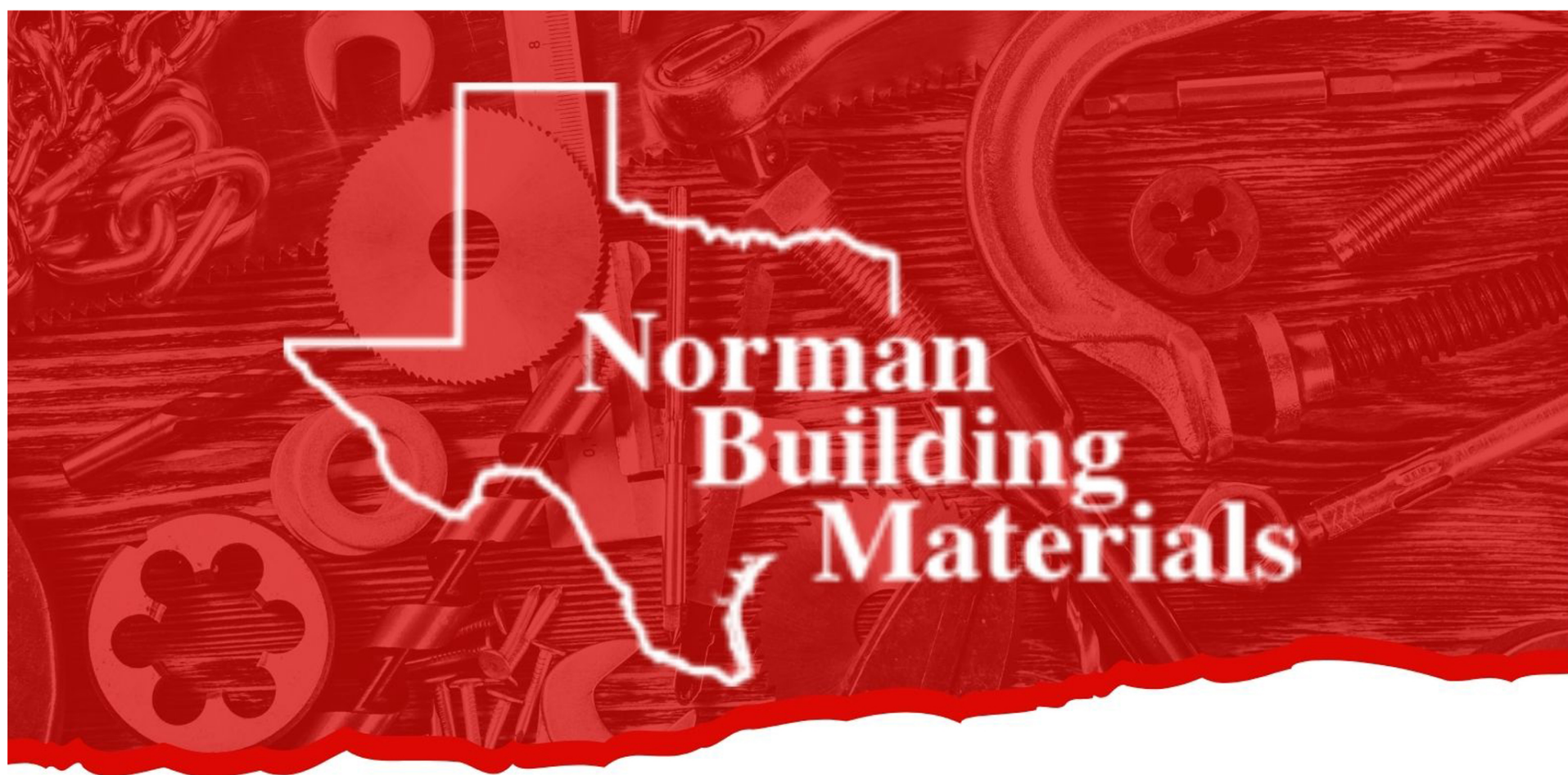
There is great speed, good defense, and a solid mix of power and small-ball that makes the Tigers a tough opponent on a “night in and night out” basis.

On the Belton squad, centerfielder Hailey Schutz and outfielder Jacklyn Munoz have been mainstays on the Tigers squad the past several seasons. Both cover a wealth of ground, both in the field and on the basepaths. The Tigers are leaning on their leadership as two of the program’s three

See **TIGERS SOFTBALL**,

Page 8





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Tigers Softball - From Page 6

seniors.

Infielders Andalyn Logan, Iris Molina, Reagan Stuart, Hanna Wheeler, Lauren Vazquez, and Tara Stone are all solid defenders and hit well. Natalie Stauffer and Natalie Goulet will also see time in the infield, both possessing solid gloves and speed.

Schutz, Munoz, Aubrey Lynch, Jasmine Ruyle, and Madison Bowling will all see significant time in the outfield.

Ruyle and Presli Thompson will split the backstopping duties, as they will handle the young pitching staff.

The Tigers' pen has no shortage of talent. Stuart started for the Tigers as a

freshman in the circle in 2024, and Wheeler pitched mainly on junior varsity with plenty of success last season. Stone is a freshman talent in the circle that many in the area have waited to see transition into high school softball.

As of Feb. 26, the Tigers were 1-6. The lone win was against Whitehouse. They dropped non-district decisions to Shoemaker, Harker Heights, and Salado and lost games to Alpine, Friendswood, and Lovejoy at the NFCA Leadoff Classic in College Station.

In the game at Salado, Stone allowed two unearned

See **BELTON**,
Page 10



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Belton - From Page 8

runs on five hits, struck out five and walked one. She also contributed a double, and got help from Molina, Logan, Vazquez, and Wheeler, who combined for six hits against Lady Eagle standout Allyson

Schauer.

“The team continues to grow and improve each day,” Birkel said. “The pitching is solid, and the team has come together.”

District 16-5A action starts March 1 with a ten-game slate



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Lake Belton fields veteran team for 2025

By Clay Whittington
The Belton Journal

Chris Peacock never tires of opening day.

During the course of his career, the Broncos' head coach has experienced a lot, and while little rivals playoff success, admittedly, it is difficult to compete with emotions surrounding the start of a season.

This year is no exception.

"This was my 23rd opening day as a high school coach," Peacock said, "and if you include all my opening days as a player in high school and college, then I am well over 30. I still had jitters and butterflies before our first game.

"I'm very excited for the season and excited to see what this team can accomplish. No matter how many returners you have, every year is a new, unique team, and I love the challenge of trying to get them to reach their full potential."

Exceeding last season's performance will be difficult.

Lake Belton was 26-7 overall in 2024, winning the district championship with an unblemished 14-0 record, and while every season is accompanied by change,

a significant portion of the Broncos' roster remains the same.

While the lineup loses standout pitcher Mason Law among others to graduation, five all-district first-team selections return for Lake Belton in senior second baseman Bryce Davis, senior outfielder Cameron Bartz, senior designated hitter Kaden Ward, senior pitcher Brandon Holley and junior catcher Braxtan Cope.

Additionally, junior shortstop Zavion Rodriguez is a returning starter.

Although the situation is promising, collectively, there is still much work to be done.

"We are definitely an older team," Peacock said, "but we are inexperienced. We are still searching for the right combinations at certain spots. We have lots of innings to replace on the mound, and we have a lot of guys that we think can fill those roles, but we just need to play more games and get those guys experience on the mound.

"These early season tournaments are so important for us to get game time against really good

See **LAKE BASEBALL**,
Page 12



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Lake baseball - From Page 11

competition.”

The Broncos have until March 25 to find cohesion, opening their District 16-5A schedule at home against Belton before traveling to complete the series later in the week.

Along with the Tigers, Lake Belton competes against Killeen Chaparral, Killeen Ellison, Waco and Waco University for the district’s playoff berths.

Thanks to a wealth of returning talent and the team’s prior record of success, the Broncos are a favorite to capture the league title, but accomplishing the task will not be easy.

“I think our district is going to be very balanced at the top with

three or four teams that are going to be competitive,” Peacock said. “Belton is always talented and well coached, and I think that Chaparral and University will have competitive teams with lots of young returning talent.

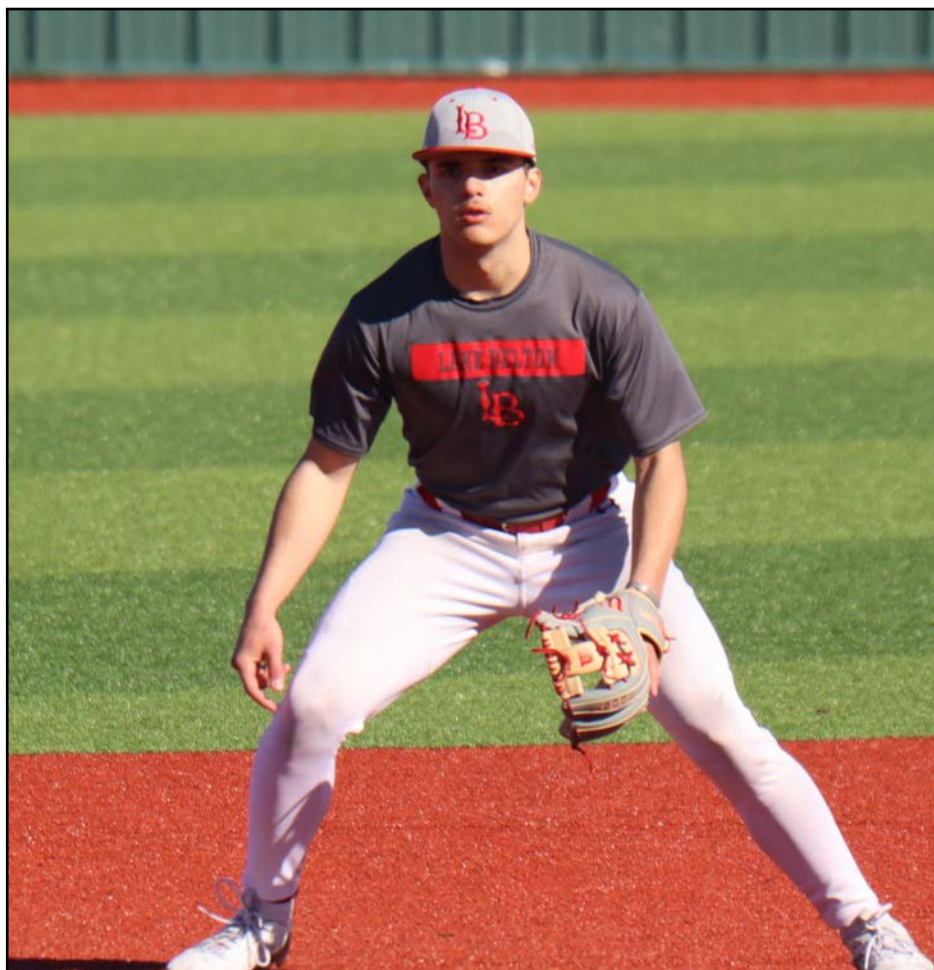
“In order for us to be successful in district, we will have to pitch like we are capable of, and we must take advantage of our opportunities on offense.”

Time remains, however, before district and ultimately playoffs arrive, marking the moments when Lake Belton intends to be peaking, and prior to getting there, the Broncos will be tested.

“We tried to schedule the most

difficult opponents that we could,” Peacock said. “We are playing a high level schedule to try and be as prepared as we possibly can be for district play and hopefully a playoff run. We are focusing on looking for pitchers to attack the strike zone and playing great defense behind our pitching staff.

“On offense, we just need to find our best nine hitters that can execute situations on a consistent basis.”



Bar has been set for Broncos Softball success

The Lake Belton Broncos won District 22-5A with a 14-0 mark, had a 31-game winning streak, went 40-5 overall, won Region III, and made a state tournament appearance.

The Broncos are led by Kelsie McEachern, who is in her second season. She is assisted by Rachel Ripley and Jeremiah Adams.

“We have been excited at what we have seen out of the team so far,” MacEachern said. “There are some things that we are improving at every day, but we see the results and the improvements. The bar was set by the 2024 team. The state tournament is the goal.”

Lake Belton’s strategy has changed over the past season. The difference offensively is that much of the power on

each squad has graduated or transferred, and the Broncos now rely on a small-ball and speed game. Lake still has power when they need it.

There are four seniors on the 2025 squad, led pitcher/infielder Maddison Ruiz and middle infielder Alexis Ortiz.

There is no shortage of experience on the Broncos roster. Nine of the Broncos on the 2025 team were with last year’s playoff team.

In the outfield, Madison Perkins, Alaysha Williams, Cameron Cotton, and Addison Sims combine power, speed, and agility, as all four cover a ton of ground from all parts of the outfield.

Lake Belton has a wealth

See **LAKE SOFTBALL**,
Page 14



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Lake Softball - From Page 13

of experience on the infield. Ruiz, Sims, Ortiz, Analicia Diaz, Briley Updyke, Lilliana Herrera, and Brysen Gott all have solid defensive skills and hit very well.

Updyke, Naser and Gott are three solid catchers that can handle pitching staffs. All three are sophomores. Updyke and Naser were solid during the Broncos' 2024 campaign and Gott co-handled Belton's staff in 2024 before moving to Lake Belton.

Ruiz is in her second season on Broncos' varsity following her freshman season at Temple and transferred to Lake her sophomore season. She blossomed as Lake's No.

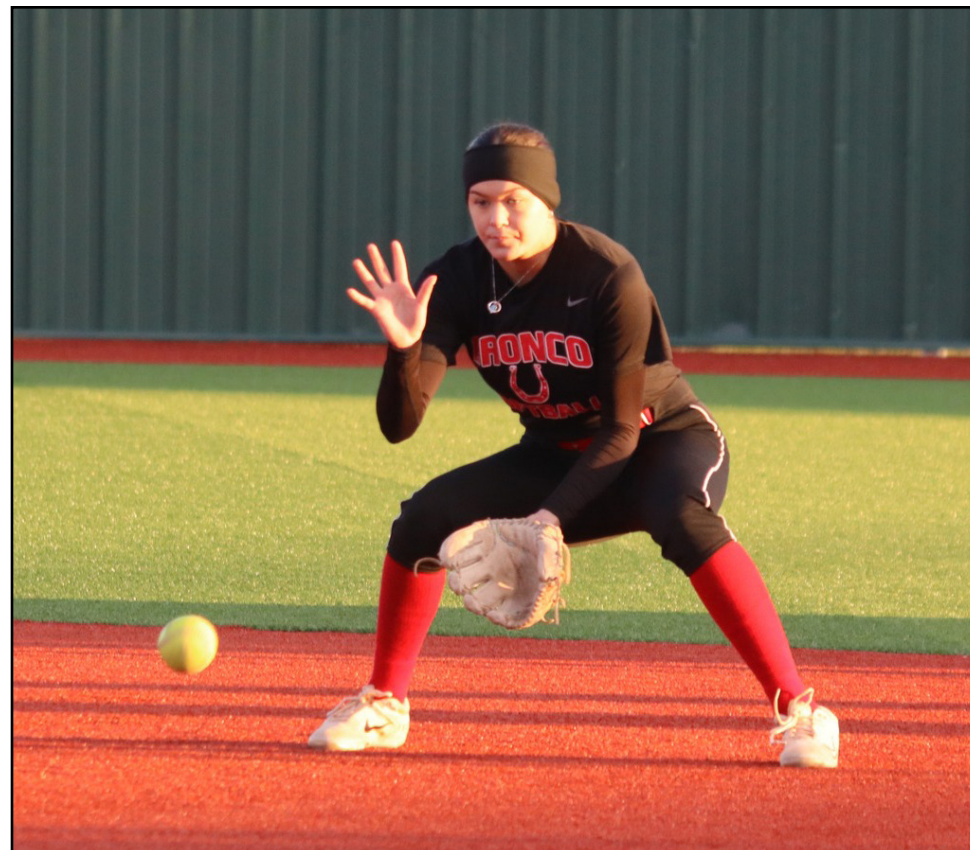
2 pitcher on the 2024 squad and has established herself as the staff ace with a no-hit, 19-strikeout performance on opening night against No. 6 Georgetown. As of Feb. 26, Ruiz has a 3-1 record with a save, ERA of 1.29, 48 strikeouts and eight walks. Natalie Hosch, whose development in the circle has grown by leaps and bounds over the past two years. Early this season, Hosch is 5-0 with one save, 26 strikeouts, three walks, and an ERA of 2.60.

Lake Belton sits at 8-1 as of Feb. 26, with non-district wins against No. 8 Georgetown, Fredericksburg, and Hutto and NFCA Tournament wins over

Little River-Academy, Temple, Class 6A No. 6 Bridgeland, Klein and Little Elm. The lone loss of the season was at the NFCA Tournament against Conroe.

District 16-5A action starts

March 1 with a ten-game slate that concludes April 17. Lake Belton, since its inaugural season in 2021, is 48-0 in district games and has four district titles, two in 4A and two in 5A.



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