

Indians load up on red paint

By SAM KING

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MONTICELLO — After the season last year, Twin Lakes shortstop Katie Reiff headed to the softball diamond to fine tune some skills when she noticed a disheartening message.

Carved into the infield dirt was the words "Sectional champions" left by an ecstatic Benton Central team. The Bison's first title came at the Indians' expense.

Equally as disheartening was having to break out some black paint after the loss.

When Desiree Swaim took over the Indians program last season, she began a tradition of putting a ladder on the press box behind home plate. Each rung represents a game on the schedule and includes the state finals.

"After each game, we win a game, we take the ladder out and they get to spray paint it red," Swaim said. "They lose, they spray paint it black. You should see when they have to go out and spray paint it black. It's like a funeral. Nobody

talks."

There were also white rungs left on the ladder for games not played, such as regional contests for Twin Lakes last year.

"It would be nice if there was no black on that ladder," Reiff said. "There's only going to be however many red rungs we spray paint on there, so I guess it's up to us."



Reiff

Last year the final count was 18 red, eight black and far too much white. There's optimism this season for more red and less black and white. The first rung this year symbolizes Thursday's contest against West Lafayette.

With the majority of last year's team returning, the goals are high for the Indians.

"I think we will do really well this year," senior Jacki Williams said. "We have some pretty amazing girls. I think we are a lot better than other

teams if we just play together."

Then there's the goal bucket.

Each game, the Twin Lakes players write down their goals and drop it in a tube. All Swaim asks is that the goals are realistic, such as getting a ball on the bat instead of getting a hit in every at bat.

Some of the goals are simple.

"This year it is going to be simple things like make sure I leave everything on the field," said Reiff, who said her goals last season were petty things when she batted .409 as a sophomore.

Some of the goals are a little tougher to achieve.

"This year I want to be the best pitcher in the conference," said Abby Dilling, who went 10-2 with a 1.14 ERA last season. "That's a pretty big goal for me and something I think I can achieve if I work hard."

The idea, Swaim said, is to teach the players goals are important, not just in softball, but in life.

"Not only do we have skill, but we are trying to show

them that working toward something and having goals is a good thing, too," Swaim said.

The players also carry softball keychains. Each individual's keychain serves as a daily reminder of what that player contributes to the team. Each player wrote their role on the keychain.

When all those roles are combined, the Indians hope the result is painting the final rung on the ladder red, meaning a state championship for the program for the first time since 1989.

Twin Lakes won all 11 of its sectional titles in a 12-year span from 1989-2000. That drought has been too long, said Reiff, who remembers watching those championship teams.

She hopes at season's end that someone else will be reading a message she leaves in the dirt. She's been preparing herself for it since last June.

"I'm ready," she said. "It might not be with my metal cleats, I might use my finger. I want it to be a little neater, but I am definitely ready."