Playing to a home crowd, the HHS softball team will kick off its 2012 season Tuesday, Aug. 28, hosting Chase County, Neb. at 4 p.m.

Six of last year's 10-member team graduated, but senior Chandler Gerk moved into recruit mode, and several Sedgwick County players joined the team to fill a 14-member roster.

Leading the Dragons this year are returning letterwinners Gerk, junior Alyssa Killin and sophomore Keeya Marquez from Revere.

Other team members are HHS seniors Elissa Baker and Camille Elliott; senior Vicki Jeffers from Julesburg; HHS sophomores Taylor Goldenstein and Stefani Razo; Sedgwick County sophomores Allison Boehm, Carolina Chavarria and Leigha Terry; and HHS freshmen Roni Beavers, Dani Brandt and Kaitlyn Lenhart.

Coach Ashley Clayton begins her fourth year as head mentor for the Lady Dragons. She will be assisted this season by Kendra Schlachter and volunteer Mike Meusborn.

Clayton competed for four years at Fort Morgan High School and on competitive ASA & USSSA teams. She received an athletic scholarship to the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, where she played catcher for three years until she suffered an injury.

Schlachter played in summer softball programs when growing up in Sidney, Neb. She coached young kids while a student at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Neb., where she earned a degree in exercise science/athletic training. She has also been involved in coaching youth programs in Holyoke the past couple of summers.

Clayton said it's been nice to have experienced team members at practice as they can lead by example and help the new team members figure out where to go.

Gerk has been the heart and soul of the team, but this year she'll really stand out in that role, said coach Clayton.

She’s been practicing all summer, encouraging teammates whether they came in with experience or not.

Killin will step into the pitching circle, and Clayton said she knows Killin is ready for it as she’s matured a lot in the two years she’s played for the Dragons. Gerk will capably fill her role behind home plate as catcher.

Returning letterwinners on the HHS softball team this season are pictured from left, Chandler Gerk, Alyssa Killin and Keeya Marquez.□□—Enterprise photo

Last year’s team qualified for the regional/state tournament for the second straight year, and they hope to build on that success.

Clayton said those returning from last year’s team bring a good attitude, as they’ve tasted success and have experienced being part of a team that gets along.

A new post-season format will be used this year. Clayton said the Colorado High School Activities Association has done away with districts in softball. At the end of the regular season, teams will be paired up for regional play on Saturday, Oct. 13, and winners from those games will advance to state competition Friday and Saturday, Oct. 19 and 20.

Following next Tuesday's season opener, the Dragons host Burlington Saturday, Sept. 1, then will play in the Burlington tournament Sept. 7-8.

Home doubleheaders are scheduled with Wray Saturday, Sept. 15 and the Homecoming game with Akron Saturday, Oct. 6.

HHS will be on the road for doubleheaders Saturday, Sept. 22 at Yuma, Tuesday, Sept. 25 at Akron for the league game and Saturday, Sept. 29 at Limon.

Coach Clayton is excited about the upcoming season, praising the girls as they're working hard and are focused on getting better.

Softball Roster

Elissa Baker—12

Camille Elliott—12

Chandler Gerk—12

Vicki Jeffers—12

Alyssa Killin—11

Allison Boehm—10

Carolina Chavarria—10

Taylor Goldenstein—10

Keeya Marquez—10

Stefani Razo—10

Leigha Terry—10

Roni Beavers—9

Dani Brandt—9

Kaitlyn Lenhart—9

Holyoke Enterprise Aug. 23, 2012