



Softball New Zealand

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23 February

EMBARGOED TO 8:30PM (NZ TIME) TUESDAY FEBRUARY 23

COOPER TO CAPTAIN NZ WHITE SOX WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS SQUAD

The New Zealand White Sox will take an experienced squad to the world women's softball championships in Canada in July - but will have a young, new leader.

Head coach Kevin Gettins has named his roster for the tournament in Surrey, British Columbia from July 15-24, 2016.

Thirteen of the 17 players have previous world championships experience with nine returning from the 2014 White Sox squad.

Six squad members have had elite American college experience at division one level.

Florida State University outfielder Ellie Cooper, 22, will take over as captain.

Cooper - the daughter of former Wellington pitcher Russell Cooper - was in the 2014 world championship squad after graduating from the Junior White Sox programme.

Lara Andrews, the White Sox skipper at the 2014 world championships, and Katrina Nukunuku, who captained the team at the Down Under series in Sydney this season, are still in the squad, but Gettins said the selectors have gone "for a totally new captain" with an eye to the future.

He said Andrews and Nukunuku would remain senior players, but it was "time for a change".

"Ellie is 22, it's a snapshot of the future coming through. It's a pretty important next four years for the women's game and Ellie has done very well as a leader at Florida State. She brings a lot of intensity, drive and high standards."

Gettins said it was "a very tough team to pick, which reinforces the fact our depth is getting stronger".

Six of the squad are on current American college scholarships with Andrews playing in the United States Pro League.

A further five players are college softball graduates.

"We think it's a pretty balanced team which gives us a number of options in every area, defence, hitting and running, and we think we've got the best four pitchers available to us," Gettins said.

Pitching staff

Three pitchers - Jennifer Feret (Auckland), Courtney Gettins (Florida Southwestern College) and Taylor Paige-Stewart, who plays in division softball with the University of Wisconsin, have previous





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world championship experience while left-hander Rita Hokianga won the American college division two championship.

Last week, Courtney Gettins, 19, was named pitcher of the week in the National Junior College Athletic Association division one competition.

Behind the plate

The White Sox have selected three catchers, 2014 incumbents Melanie Gettins and Kyla Bromhead, and naturalised American Stefanie Smith, who can also play other positions.

Coach Gettins said Smith's citizenship applications was "being processed. We are confident, given the feedback we've had, that her application will be approved in time for the tournament, but we've got a cut-off date just in case it doesn't happen and we have to make a change."

While the White Sox do not have an experienced, specialist first baseman, Gettins is confident several players can cover the role, including Feret "when she's not pitching".

New faces

Four players will be making their senior world championships debut - Hokianga, Smith, infielders Hailey Breakwell and Kuraroa Ratu-James, 17-year-old utility Mereana Makea,

Gettins said shortstop Breakwell, an American with a New Zealand Olympian equestrian rider father, had been "a great find for us".

Makea broke her arm playing for Wellington at last weekend's National Fastpitch Championships, but Gettins expects her and Hutt Valley outfielder Charlotte Pointon, who fractured a finger, to be fit in time for the world championships.

A New Zealand A team, to be named later this week, will take part in the Southern Cross Challenge tournament in Christchurch, 25-28 March.

NOTE: Katrina Nukunuku, 27, Melanie Gettins, 26, and Lara Andrews, 26, will be playing at their fourth world championships - an honour shared with four of the biggest names in New Zealand women's softball - Marilyn Marshall, Gina Weber, Fiona Timu and Melisa Upu.

Only two New Zealand women, International Softball Federation Hall of Fame members Rhonda Hira and Lesley Monk, have played in five.

The world championships were staged every four years until 2012. They are now held every two years.

SQUAD

The New Zealand White Sox squad for the world women's softball championships is:

Pitchers: Jennifer Feret (Auckland), Courtney Gettins (Florida South Western College), Rita Hokianga (Hutt Valley), Taylor-Paige Stewart (University of Wisconsin).





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Catchers: Melanie Gettins (Hutt Valley), Stefanie Smith (Auckland), Kyla Bromhead (Auckland).

Infielders: Katrina Nukunuku (Auckland), Danica Ferriso (Midland College, Texas), Hailey Breakwell (Hutt Valley), Mikayla Werahiko (Florida South Western), Kuraroa Ratu-James (Hutt Valley), Mereana Makea (Wellington).

Outfielders: Ellie Cooper (Florida State University, captain), Charlotte Pointon (Hutt Valley), Lara Andrews (Pennsylvania Rebellion), Kingsley Avery (Ave Maria University, Florida).

Non-travelling reserves: Keri Simeon (Wellington), Tyneesha Houkamau (Colorado Mesa University), Gillian Wills (Auckland).

Head coach: Kevin Gettins. Assistant-coach: Tony Simpson. Manager: Aroha Metcalf.

FOR FURTHER COMMENT PLEASE CONTACT

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