

The Salem High School girls' softball team will enter next week's sectional softball tournament off the heels of their first Mid Southern Conference title in more than a decade.

The Lady Lions are 16-3 and hold a perfect in MSC play with one game, against Silver Creek remaining.

Salem clinched the outright MSC title last week with a 3-1 win over Charlestown.

Head Coach Jennifer Morris said she is glad her team can add the word "Champions" to their list of accomplishments.

"I'm so happy for the girls," she said. "I was blessed to have a successful high school program and I've wanted that for these kids and that's been my goal since I took the job; I've wanted these kids to taste what team success feels like. Winning the MSC is the first step, and it's awesome to see their faces and their reaction. Some of them said it didn't even feel real yet."

Over the past 12 years, Salem has fielded some very talented teams, but winning the MSC is the kind of accomplishment that separates a great team from the good ones.

"One of our big things is that we're tired of Salem being 'OK' or 'pretty good.'" Morris said. "We've pushed and pushed for years now to get them to this next level and be great. They have that opportunity now to make history and leave their mark at this school and for our program. It's time to get over the hump."

Morris credits the end to the decade plus drought to hard work, both by the players and the coaches.

"These girls put in so much work," she said. "So many of our girls have spent years of their lives playing this game. Many of them have spent hundreds and maybe of thousands of dollars going to camps, clinics, lessons, travel ball. I'm so proud of them. They understand now, it's a year around game to be at this level.

"I also have some great assistants. JD Wade-Swift has put in hours of work studying other teams, studying pitch calls and video, and working with our pitchers. We've added Greg Campbell to our staff as a volunteer and he puts in so much time. He oversees our middle school program, is in charge of our outfielders, and has been crucial to helping us with decisions and has amazing game knowledge."

When sectional play begins, Salem will once again have to navigate through some tough MSC water as all seven teams in the Class 3A Sectional 30 are MSC foes.

Salem opens against Scottsburg next Monday at 5:30 at the Lady Lions home field and should they win that game, they are set for a rematch with Charlestown on Wednesday, May 22, also at 5:30 p.m.

Morris said she hopes her team gets another shot at the Lady Pirates, because even though Salem won the game, they didn't play well.

"Charlestown has a great pitcher," she said. "We only had two hits on her and struck out 16 times, but our girls got on base and got the job done. I want another shot at hitting her in sectional."

Corydon, Silver Creek, Brownstown and North Harrison are on the other side of the bracket.

The sectional championship is scheduled for Thursday, May 23 at 6 p.m.

Morris said she and her team knows they have a bulls-eye on their backs heading into the tournament, but that is nothing new.

“Don’t get me wrong, we are the target, but, teams have been gunning for us lately because we found ourselves ranked,” Morris said. “We’ve had to mentally adjust to getting that kind of recognition; that’s not something we are used to. We’ve had a couple of wake up calls in the past two weeks. We realize our ranking doesn’t give us the right to show up and win. We’ve learned and will grow from that. This is new territory for us.”

If the Lady Lions are to continue lifting the softball program to another level, it is all going to have to start on the defensive side of the ball.

“Our pitchers are great,” she said. “We have the advantage in that area, no one has what we have. We have not one, but three high level varsity pitchers to choose from on an inning to inning basis, and our pitchers can field, so we can just move them around at will. We play good defense, but we need to do that consistently.”

Tickets for Sectional 30 at Salem are \$6 per session, or an entire tournament pass can be purchased for \$9.