

SPORTS

Softball team to sport new look

Brown wants Oregon to be more aggressive at the plate

By Ashley Conklin
Emerald Sports Editor

There wouldn't seem to be much to change with the Oregon softball team.

After all, the Ducks have one of the most successful programs in the nation and have made it to post-season play the past two seasons.

But second-year Coach Tami Brown has revamped the Oregon offense this winter, and with the loss of 10 players from last season's squad, Brown has a distinctly new team.

And it won't be a team that will have to be carried by junior pitcher Katie Wiese either, as Brown looks for an explosive offense and the team's depth to be the mainstays of this group.

"We'll be a more productive team and a more mature team," Brown said.

Although Oregon finished 35-23 last season and tied for third in the Pacific-10 Conference with a 9-9 league slate, it took Brown and the rest of the team most of the season to adjust to new personalities and a new style of play.

While Brown said she didn't feel any pressure to come into a program that went 54-11 overall and tied for fifth in the College Softball World Series, she

would much rather look ahead to this season than dwell on last year.

"I knew we had talent and I knew the kids, but I think it was hard to adjust to the personalities," she said. "They were used to (former Coach) Teresa (Wilson) and didn't know my style. I'm glad the first year is over."

Probably no one will benefit more from having worked with Brown and pitching coach Michele Smith — a former all-American at Oklahoma State — than Wiese.

After being named the Pac-10 player of the year in 1989 when she was 42-13, Wiese struggled with a new NCAA rule on foot-mound placement and was 24-12 last year. Still, she was virtually unhittable and was again one of the most dominating pitchers in the Pac-10.

Wiese has added a change-up to her repertoire and Brown said her star pitcher is "10 times better."

"She's more in control," Brown said. "With her change-up she is so much better than she ever has been."

Brown also said that Wiese, who threw 647 innings in her first two seasons, won't pitch as much this season with freshman Rachelle Taylor taking over some of the load.

Not only did Wiese struggle at times last year, but so did the rest of the Ducks offensively, which is why Brown has decided to make this team a much more explosive one.

"Last year they were looking for their pitch too much and not taking enough cuts," she said. "I want to change their attitude on hitting so they know to crush the ball when it's anywhere near the zone."

"I don't want them to be tentative out there," Brown said. "We need to attack (the pitch) more and explode on it."

While the Ducks have been a run-and-slap team in the past, Brown said that with teams now knowing how to defend the slap technique, it's become obsolete.

"It's literally been run in the ground," she said.

Leading Oregon at the plate this season will again be senior first baseman Julie Cavanaugh, along with junior shortstop Kim Manning, junior rightfielder Anna Poore and junior catcher Tracey Simmons.

Cavanaugh had an outstanding year last season after mostly playing catcher the year before. She led the team with a .351 average, 32 runs scored and 15

stolen bases.

"I don't think there's a better first baseman in the country," Brown said of Cavanaugh.

The key to the Duck attack could likely be Manning, now comfortably entrenched at shortstop after learning the position last season.

Two years ago Manning was a second-team all-American while hitting .324 and setting a school-record 19 stolen bases as the team's designated player. Manning fell off to only a .206 average last season though while trying to learn the new position.

"I think Kim really should have been playing shortstop here all along," Brown said.

Manning is also a perfect example of what Brown is looking for offensively this season, still emphasizing an aggressive running game on the bases while also hitting for power.

"Kim has very explosive potential," Brown said. "She has to know to drag the ball when they're playing back and hit for power. Like I told her, she has a cut that can part your hair."

Brown has moved Poore to the outfield this season after she mostly pitched and was the designated player last year. The move to the outfield was made to take some of the pressure off Poore, Brown said, and she likes Poore's potential as a rightfielder.

While Simmons, a two-year starter at different positions, has again settled in at catcher this season, Oregon will start two freshmen, Jennifer Topham and Patty Pyles at second and third base, respectively.

Both Topham and Pyles bring speed to the infield and Brown is counting on both to shore up some of the defensive problems the Ducks had there last season.

Senior Kelly Finley will return to start at leftfield, while junior college transfer Marnie McCall, a two-time all-American at Central Arizona College, will play centerfield.

"She could be the best outfielder Oregon has ever seen," Brown said of McCall.

The Ducks will once again play one of the toughest schedules in the country, facing nationally-ranked UCLA, California, Arizona and Arizona State in conference action. Oregon will also play in three of the nation's premiere tournaments, including the Arizona Softball Classic, where Oregon begins the season Thursday against Ohio State.



File photo
Junior pitcher Katie Wiese (left) and senior first baseman Julie Cavanaugh will again be the leaders of the Oregon softball team this season.

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