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Quick McCall leads league hitting

By Jayson Jacoby
Emerald Sports Reporter

Marnie McCall steps to the plate and slaps a pitch down the third base line. At the crack of the bat, she heads for first base.

The Oregon State third baseman fields the ball cleanly and hesitates for just an instant before throwing to first.

That brief span of time is all McCall needs, as the Oregon softball team's center fielder turns an infield hit into yet another single.

The preceding scenario is all too familiar for Oregon's opponents. McCall, a senior from Crater High School near Medford, is the Pacific-10 Conference's leading hitter by a large margin.

McCall has turned her mastery of what is called the "slap-and-run" hitting style into a .457 batting average, more than 50 percentage points higher than the league's No. 2 hitter.

One of the league's fastest players, McCall also leads the Pac-10 with 32 stolen bases. She broke the Oregon single-season record of 31 earlier this year, and with 18 games left has a good chance to eclipse the conference mark of 49 thefts.

McCall also tops the Pac-10 with 58 hits and is just 17 short of breaking the Ducks' record of 74 hits in a season.

For those not familiar with fast-pitch softball, McCall explains the slap-and-run style as easily as she performs it.

"The idea is to try and get (the ball) between the shortstop and third base, but it doesn't always happen," she said. "It's kind of like a game actually."



Marnie McCall

You hit the ball and try to beat out the throw."

And that's exactly what McCall does most of the time.

Surprisingly, McCall said her introduction to the slap and run came not at an early age, but four years ago when she was a freshman at Central Arizona junior college.

"I'd never heard of (slap and run) in high school too much," McCall said. "I started at Central (Arizona). (Coach Clint Myers) started me hitting left handed. This is only my fourth year hitting that way."

The slap and run is only effective with left-handed batters because they are already two steps closer to first base than right-handed hitters.

As good as McCall has been this season, Oregon head coach Tami Brown sees even more potential in her speedy lead-off hitter.

"Marnie can even take it a step higher," Brown said. "That's how good a player she is."

Brown said the Ducks rely heavily on McCall to get their offense off to a good start every game.

"It's extremely important that Marnie is consistently getting on base," Brown said. "People don't want her on because they know how fast she is. I think she's a catalyst to the success of the team. She sets the pace."

After leading Central Arizona to back-to-back national junior college championships, McCall said she was anxious to return to her native state.

Brown said she was aware of McCall while serving as an assistant coach at Arizona State four years ago.

"I watched all the Central Arizona kids," Brown said. "When I came here I didn't realize she was from Oregon. When I was made aware of that, we went right after her."

And McCall didn't disappoint last year, her first at Oregon. She finished third on the team with 56 hits and a .337 batting average. She was also second in stolen bases with 22.

But this season McCall has really blossomed, putting up numbers that should make her a strong candidate for post-season honors.

"It's my senior year, and I think I thought about it a little more," McCall said. "I tried to have more fun and relax a little bit."

Oregon will need every bit of McCall's speed this afternoon when the Ducks host top-ranked UCLA. The Bruins' only loss this season was to second-ranked Arizona.

Contrary to some schedules, today's doubleheader starts at 2:30 p.m.

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