



CORY PRICE Clackamas Print

After months of practice, the Cougar women will begin the 2003 season with the Fresno City College Tournament on March 22-23 in Fresno, Calif. Last year, the Cougars finished second in the NWAACC tourney, losing to Lower Columbia College in the final.

Softball nears opener

• The cougars have four returning vets from last year, optimistic this year

Frank Jordan

The Clackamas Print

The 2003 version of the Clackamas softball team holds a lot of promise as the Cougars look to improve on their second place finish in last spring's Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges (NWAACC) championships.

"We are very excited about the upcoming season. We have another strong group of kids," said Head Softball Coach Paul Fiskum. "Let's just say that we are 'cautiously optimistic,' to coin a phrase, about our chances."

The Cougars return four sophomores from last year's team, which lost in the NWAACC championship game to Lower Columbia College. This group includes an all-tournament pitcher, a second-team all-NWAACC infielder and a first-team all-NWAACC outfielder.

Miranda Gillaspie threw a perfect game for the Cougars last year, along with two other no-hitters and two one-hitters. She has been "looking good in her workouts through the fall and winter," according to Fiskum.

Catcher Carla Lillis returns to her spot behind the plate as she looks to build on her performance last season. Lillis led the team in walks and on-base percentage from the number four spot in the offensive lineup, and has worked on improving her defensive skills over the offseason.

Brooke Comstock led the Cougars in 2002 in hits and sacrifice bunts, and Fiskum said "she has really worked on increasing

her physical strength over the off-season, which in turn has led her to hit the ball much harder in pre-season workouts." Comstock is also the unofficial team defensive captain from her infield position.

"Brooke is probably the most vocal of all of our players, and she is a very good leader. She is highly committed to the team and has really bought in to what we want to accomplish as a team," said Fiskum.

Morgan Huffstetter was voted first-team all-NWAACC in the outfield for the 2002 season, although she spent about two-thirds of her time playing first base for the Cougars.

"Morgan is the real deal. She has the complete package. She can hit for power, but she is also one of the best bunters in the conference. Most of all, though, is that she is a great defensive player," said Fiskum. "She probably has the best hands on the team, and that makes her a great defender, both at first base and in the outfield."

Melissa Gibson is another sophomore who is playing for the first time in college. She was a first-team all-stater in high school and currently plays basketball for Clackamas. Fiskum convinced her that she could be a real asset on the softball diamond and encouraged her to come out for the team.

"Melissa is such a great athlete, we were in a position to capitalize on her skills," said Fiskum. "She had a great high school career and we will fit her into our lineup, somehow, somewhere. She has had limited workouts with us due to her commitment to basketball,

but we are really looking forward to when her other season ends."

A solid group of freshmen are coming into the Cougar mix this season and a couple of the standouts are Carleen Lessard and Brianne Thurn. Thurn was the Oregon Class 4A Player of the Year last year, when she led Springfield to the state championship game, but the injury bug has hit Thurn hard since then.

"Brianne had shoulder surgery last summer, and also was diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat. The heart problem was corrected, but she soon after strained an abdominal muscle, which has hindered her workouts," Fiskum said. "She is really chomping at the bit to get back out there. She has been throwing lightly and doing some conditioning drills. We really look forward to her performing for us soon."

Lessard had very good fall workouts, according to Fiskum.

"Carleen played for one of the best ASA (American Softball Association) teams in the Northwest last summer. She has a very good work ethic, probably the best on the team. She continues to talk to her ASA

pitching coach at least once a week to get advice."

Last year's NWAACC champion, Lower Columbia, may be the pick of the coaches to challenge for this year's crown. Chemeketa CC picked up an NCAA Division II transfer from Northern Colorado that Fiskum tried to get to play for Clackamas, but the athlete wanted to be closer to her home in Salem.

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Cougar men take seventh

Basketball team finishes with overall record of 21-10

Nic Delzell

The Clackamas Print

The Clackamas men's basketball team entered last weekend's Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges tournament in a three-way tie for first place in the Southern Region.

As of Sunday night the Cougars were 2-1 in NWAACC tournament play, and on Monday they played for fourth place in the tournament.

Unranked in the NWAACC Coaches' Poll, the Cougars started off the tournament last Friday night, with a come from behind victory against Seattle. Cougar guard Brandon Gill led the scoring attack with 28 points. Down by as much as 12 in the first half, the Cougars fought their way back and were only down two going into the second half. Scoring 46 points in the second half, the Cougars took control and finished the game with an 81-63 victory.

The Cougars second game was a disappointing loss to Treasure Valley. Gill led the way again with 20 points, Chris Hoyt and Russ Schneider followed with 15 each. The Cougars were up by as many as 18 in the first half but a determined Treasure Valley team fought back and was down only four going in to the locker room. Outscoring the Cougars by 22 in the second half, Treasure

Valley's late game effort resulted in a 91-73 win.

With a win and a loss the Cougars played in the fourth place semifinal game on Sunday. A hard fought game where Cougar leading scorer Evan Keiling got back on track with 31 points ended in an overtime Cougar victory 97-89. Both teams led by no more than eight, with 13 ties and eight lead changes. Gill and Schneider followed Kieling with 16 points each.

Monday, the Cougars played for fourth place. They were defeated by Big Bend 96-84, landing them with the seventh place spot in the NWAACCs. Gill once again led the Cougars with 33 points; he also snagged 7 rebounds.

The Cougars finished the season with a 21-10 record overall. Yakima Valley knocked off Green River in the Championship match on Monday. The close final of 80-78 secured Yakima Valley's first title since 1976.

NWAACC TOURNAMENT FINAL STANDINGS
1st--Yakima Valley
2nd--Green River
3rd--Treasure Valley
4th--Big Bend
5th--Tacoma
6th--Bellevue
7th--Clackamas
8th--Mt. Hood

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