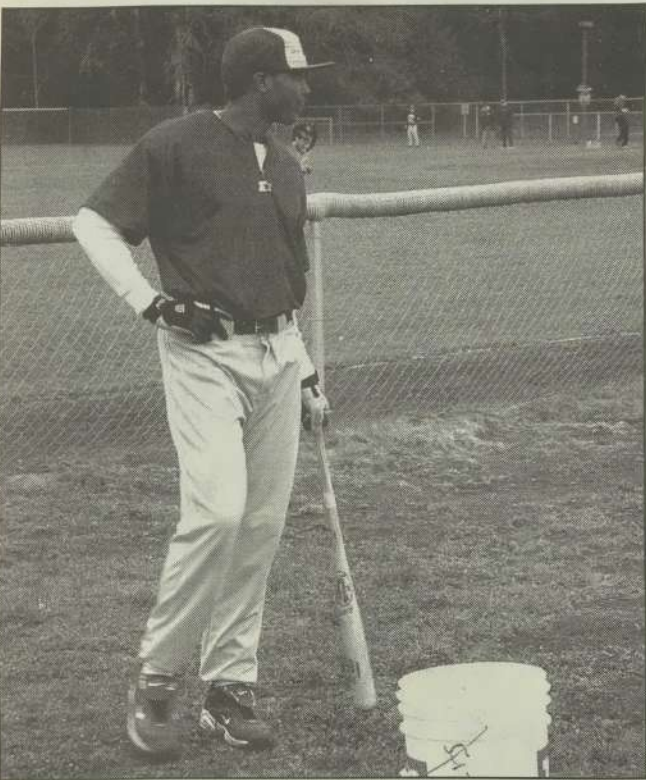


Baseball's back: Hitting it off



Jeff Sorensen Clackamas Print

Sophomore transfer DJ Johnson awaits his turn to hit in the cages. Johnson hopes to be a force in the Cougar lineup.

Michael McCormack
Sports Co-Editor

The sun is shining for longer and the grass is looking plusher every day; springtime is amongst us and that means baseball season is gearing up.

The 2005 Clackamas campaign is looking strong early this spring and with the season starting this Saturday, they're feeling confident for a successful season.

"Everybody's real excited about getting out there and playing; our guys have worked hard and that is all you can ask for," Cougars first-baseman Dejuan "DJ" Johnson said.

Johnson is one of two newly acquired sophomore transfers for Coach Robbie Robinson this season, the other being infielder Mike Veselik.

Johnson comes to Clackamas from San Francisco City College. He has an uncanny work ethic along with great athletic ability; he will most likely hit in the third or fourth spot for the Cougs.

Veselik arrived at Clackamas from division nemesis Chemeketa. Robinson says that he is a winner and will help make the team successful. Both Johnson and Veselik will anchor a steady infield for the

Cougars this season.

In addition to these transfers, the Cougars have a strong leadership base in the pitching staff, returning four hurlers from last season, including Bryan Goff, Travis Galbraith, Hap Purden and Jack Whipple.

"We have more leadership on the mound than we have had in the past," Robinson said. "Pitching is a big find for us, to find guys who are consistent."

Goff is the leader of the group and will be the Cougars' number one starter come Opening Day. He is big and strong, and the velocity on his fastball has vastly improved from last season.

Galbraith will be the number two man for Clackamas. He stands tall up on the mound with a 6-foot, 6-inch frame and was one of the best for the Cougars in the 2004 season. Galbraith represented CCC in the Fall NWAACC All-Star game.

The Cougars will be deep at the catcher position with four backstops on the roster. The likely starter will be Mike McNally, who will be considered a freshman this season after leaving Eastern Oregon University where he had red-shirted in 2004. Jared Beeler, Robert Badilla and Miles Johnson will all contribute as well behind the plate. They all will likely rotate games early on in the

season.

The Cougar outfield has experience in Josh Breslaw, who was selected to play center field for Cougar nine.

"Josh can flat out fly," Robinson said.

Breslaw will show off that speed on the base paths as well, hitting lead-off come game day. He was selected to play in the Fall Star game and will be looked upon as a leader for the team.

Alongside Breslaw will be Tyler Liebelt in left field. He is another returning Cougar expected to play in the infield made the off-season transition to the outfield grass. Liebelt will likely be slated in the number spot in the Cougar lineup.

The outlook is good for the season and the Cougars hope to knocking on the post-season come May.

The team will find out where they really stand amongst the conference elite on consecutive weekends this month when they travel to in two tournaments featuring some of the top NWAACC teams, Lower Columbia and Columbia Basin.

The first home game Clackamas will be held on March 2, when highly touted Mt. Hood comes to town for a double-header. The first game will begin at 1 p.m.

Cougars' softball sets sights on NWAACC championship title

Frank Jordan
The Clackamas Print

The 2005 version of the Clackamas softball team will hit the field with a lot of new faces, but the team is quickly making strides in what appears to be another exciting season on the CCC campus.

"We have a really good group of kids; they have had an outstanding winter season of getting prepared and all of our workouts have been really, really good," said Head Coach Paul Fiskum. "We have some very talented and versatile players that we have brought in to complement a great returning group of sophomores."

The Cougars are coming off a season where they made their third straight trip to the NWAACC championship game, only to lose for the third straight year to the dynasty that is known as Lower Columbia College. The Lady Red Devils have won six consecutive NWAACC championships, but that has not deterred Fiskum and his outstanding group of women, who look to challenge again for what would be Clackamas' eighth NWAACC title.

"We return both of our starting pitchers from last season. Holly Marlow set a school record with 21 victories last year, and Chelsea Koch had a solid 11-4 record. Both girls have looked real sharp in our workouts, so we are looking real solid in that area."

Other returning sophomores include All-NWAACC infielder Cijay Koanui, a switchhitter who does everything well. She will bat leadoff and has also been working out at catcher.

Nikki Winkley had a great freshman season for the Cougars, batting

over .350 with four home runs and returns to the outfield this season. Fiskum calls Winkley "probably our most aggressive outfielder and has really improved her hitting over last year. She also has been one of our more vocal leaders on the field and in the dugout."

Kayce Emst has really improved her hitting, including hitting for power. Emst will do the majority of the catching this season, but will also be called upon to play some outfield. She also is one of the vocal leaders on this team, and is known for being extremely positive with a great attitude.

A few of the freshmen that will see significant playing time include Caitlin Ooley, Erin Snyder, Anna Alcalá, Casey Middagh, Christina Roberti and Brianna Mondragon.

"Ooley is very talented and very versatile; Snyder comes to us from a good Canby program and is very quick. Alcalá is the prototypical first baseman, very tall, very strong, with a

good left-handed glove. Middagh was a great outfielder in high school and has hit the ball well in workouts. Roberti is another left-handed first baseman and she had a great fall and winter. She can also play some in the outfield. Mondragon is also very talented and very versatile."

One of the main goals in the pre-season, as it is every year, is to see how the pieces all fit together and how the team gels into a championship-caliber unit.

"We have some really good depth, which will help us a lot," said Fiskum. "It is just up to us and the coaching staff to see where it all fits."

Pitching Coach Kim Ostlund is on maternity leave, but will help out on a limited basis. Fiskum got longtime coach Denise Nasuta to come out of retirement to help his team, and "she

is really excited to be back to help."

Even the field is taking shape, thanks to a work party two weeks ago with a bunch of volunteers helping to cover the dugouts and get the field into playing shape for the upcoming season.

"We are very optimistic at this point of the season. Every team in the division looks to be competitive as always. Lower Columbia is the defending champion and has a lot of sophomores coming back," said Fiskum. "Mt. Hood returns everyone and Chemeketa looks real solid. South Puget Sound is just that close to being an NWAACC contender and Centralia is on the upswing. I look for a very tough conference race again."

The Cougars open the season with a game against Northwest Christian College in Eugene tomorrow at 1 p.m. The first home game will be March 29 with a doubleheader against Grays Harbor College beginning at 2 p.m. on the Cougar softball diamond.



Jeff Sorensen Clackamas Print

Holly Marlow strides forward to deliver a pitch as Kayce Emst gives a target behind the plate; both players return from 2004.

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