

Cougars fail to finish strong

By John William Howard
Associate Sports Editor

An overcast sky blots out the sun and threatens rain. A flock of geese honk their way over the newly mown grass, but are drowned out by the excited yet subdued murmur of the home crowd. Louder still are the never ending jeers, cheers and cat-calls emanating from the dugout. Throughout all of these things, one thing is steady and remains unbroken: the stare between pitcher and batter. It's the bottom of the eighth inning, and the home team is down 6-5. The bases are loaded with two outs.

The pitcher sends the ball rocketing toward home plate and the batter connects, launching the ball far across the field, over the sprinting left-fielder and past the outer wall. The normally calm fans erupt as their team scores four runs, bringing the home team to the lead and stunning the visitors. Once the inning has finished, the team can finally react. Behind the dugout, the head coach swears angrily and the pitcher walks dazed towards the bullpen. None of the players have much to say to one another except for the first base coach muttering "That's baseball" as he left the field. As they have all season, they've let another one slip away.

Clackamas Community College's ninth inning rally fell short, and the Cougars ended up losing a heartbreaking 9-7 to the Lane Community College Titans. The road team lost the second game 5-4, and the narrow sweep of the double header was tell-tale for the year, a year in which they finished 19-23 and missed the playoffs. There have been good moments, but each one of them has been followed by a letdown, something that teaches the players and coaches to quickly learn from bad experiences and move on.

"Guys with serious talent that dwell on their mistakes aren't going to go very far," said pitcher Roman Lorenz, who watched his pitch sail far above his head and over the fence. "Baseball is a game of failure. If you fail 70 percent of the time, you'll make it into the hall of fame."

While Lorenz's words about moving past mistakes ring true for any sport, no sport has more to do with failure than baseball. Many games end with the teams combining for less than 10 points, meaning that one big hit can be enough to turn a game around. That means that focus and determination are both key to success in baseball.

"There's a whole bunch of heartbreak because we're disappointed in how we have played," said Head Coach Robin Robinson, who told of several instances where players fell asleep at their positions and ended up burning the team for it. "It's a little disappointing to me because the sophomores didn't perform all year. To me, once you start your sophomore year, you're the veteran. You're the guy who should be better than

everybody else. You set the tone."

One sophomore that has stepped up to the plate, so to speak, is Zach Miller. Miller played sparingly last season at second base, playing in only about 10 innings. At the beginning of this season, he made the switch to third base, a move that sped up the game a lot for him. The biggest change though was Miller's offensive performance.

"Offensively it has probably been my best year that I've ever had throughout my entire career," said Miller, who mentioned that he was hitting nearly .400 for the season. "I never really expected to hit that well, but it just fell into place ... (for the team) it's been a rough year. (I'm) disappointed in how we've turned out. I thought we were a lot better than what we've showed and it's kind of disappointing that we didn't make it to the playoffs."

"As a team I felt that we underachieved," said right fielder Sergio Cruz. "I thought we had enough talent to win first place and make it to NWAACCS."

Cruz has had success this year offensively, batting over .300 and is the only returning player to have made all-region last season, his first after graduating from high school in Brooklyn, N.Y. He also mentioned that a struggle for the team was cohesiveness from the players not on the field.

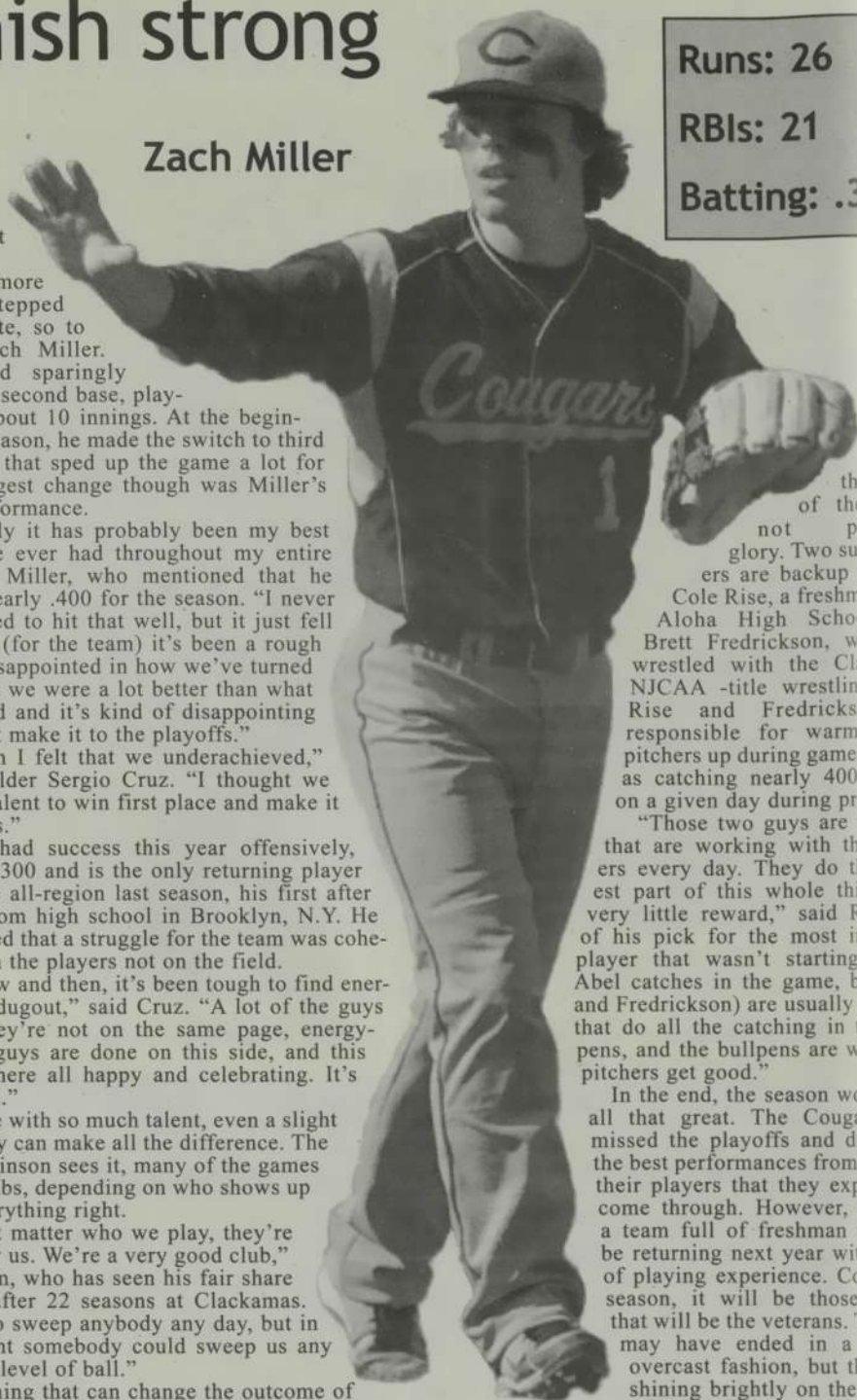
"Every now and then, it's been tough to find energy from the dugout," said Cruz. "A lot of the guys seem like they're not on the same page, energy-wise. Some guys are done on this side, and this dude is out here all happy and celebrating. It's kind of weird."

In a league with so much talent, even a slight lack of energy can make all the difference. The way that Robinson sees it, many of the games are up for grabs, depending on who shows up and does everything right.

"It doesn't matter who we play, they're threatened by us. We're a very good club," said Robinson, who has seen his fair share of baseball after 22 seasons at Clackamas. "We could go sweep anybody any day, but in the same light somebody could sweep us any day. It's that level of ball."

Another thing that can change the outcome of a season is when players step up in the background

Zach Miller



Runs: 26

RBIs: 21

Batting: .386

for the go of the team not person glory. Two such players are backup catcher Cole Rise, a freshman from Aloha High School, and Brett Fredrickson, who wrestled with the Clackamas NJCAA -title wrestling team Rise and Fredrickson are responsible for warming up pitchers up during games as well as catching nearly 400 pitches on a given day during practice. "Those two guys are the ones that are working with the pitchers every day. They do the hardest part of this whole thing with very little reward," said Robinson of his pick for the most impactful player that wasn't starting. "Rise and Fredrickson are usually the guys that do all the catching in the bullpens, and the bullpens are where the pitchers get good."

In the end, the season won't be all that great. The Cougars have missed the playoffs and didn't get the best performances from many of their players that they expected to come through. However, this was a team full of freshman that will be returning next year with plenty of playing experience. Come next season, it will be those players that will be the veterans. This year may have ended in a gloomy overcast fashion, but the sun is shining brightly on the baseball team's future.



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Katie Aamatti Clackamas Print
Backup catcher Brett Fredrickson takes a swing during a home game earlier this season. Fredrickson and teammate Cole Rise put countless hours into working with the pitchers.

