

SOFTBALL SEASON SLIDES ON

THE COUGARS SOFTBALL TEAM LOOKS AHEAD AFTER A SHAKY START TO SOUTHERN REGION SCHEDULE

BY EDGARD VALENCIA

Grass is green once again and the birds are back. Sunny days and Clackamas Community College softball are finally in the forecast.

This season, the Cougars hope to build from last year's success, where they finished third in the NWAC tournament and were crowned Southern Region champions.

With 12 out of 17 in the roster being new faces, head softball coach Jessica Buel knows it won't be easy repeating the same success from last season.

"We pretty much have a brand new team this year, so the results of last year's team don't have much relevance," Buel said. "Our goal every year is to continue to improve, with the ultimate goal of winning an NWAC title."

The new additions seem to have quickly adapted to the playing style of their coach, as the Cougars have started the season 22-7. They sit second after a shaky start in the Southern Region at 3-3.

The Cougars opened up region play with double header losses at home to Lower Columbia but bounced right back against Mt. Hood Community College by winning both games in opponents' home ground.

With a new opportunity to get their first region play win at home, the Cougars took on Chemeketa Community College in a thrilling double header. Two returning players and 2015 Region All-Stars put the team on their shoulders in the first game.

Sophomore Kylie Gonzales had three RBIs including the game-winning home run earning the win 4-1. Sophomore pitcher Emily Marchbanks struck out seven, guiding the path for the Cougars win where she only allowed one earned run on four hits and two walks in seven innings.

Things didn't go so well for the Cougars in the second game. After a two-run first inning, things tumbled down for the rest of the game. Freshman pitcher Ceidilee Nobriga allowed six runs in 6 2/3 innings, striking one

and walked four. Gonzales had two RBIs on two hits, but her contributions weren't enough as they got outplayed which led to Chemeketa winning the second game 6-3.

Gonzales who was named Southern Region First Team All-Star last season leads the Cougars in HR with 9 and RBIs with 39 in 29 games so far. She is well in track to surpass her stats from last year as she had 11 HR and 51 RBI's in 45 games.

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- Jessica Buel

Photo by Travis David V Whittaker



Hannah Vandomelen steals second base in the bottom of the sixth inning against Chemeteka on Tuesday, April 12.

"My mindset coming into this season was to be the best and most successful player I can to help my team be successful," said Gonzales. "What motivates me are my coaches and my teammates because they believe in me."

Southern Region Second Team All-Star last season pitcher Marchbanks has also started the season in a very good way. Her 10 wins (fifth in NWAC), 84 strike outs (fourth in NWAC), and 3.21 earned run average (ninth in NWAC) have been fundamental in how the season has been so far for the Cougars.

Another player to keep an eye on is freshman Katie Rose who has adapted well to the college playing style and leads the Cougars with a batting average of 0.452 along with 28 hits and 18 RBI's in 17 games.

"Hitting college has motivated me even more because when you hit college you realize that it's going to end within the next three to four years years," Rose said. "You have to take advantage of the friends you make along the way, the playing time, and even just the journey along the way."

The Cougars traveled to Yakima, Wash. last weekend for the Crossover Tournament in which they played four games in two days. After a big first game defeat to Douglas College by a score of 10-2, the team made adjustments and won all of their remaining games which included convincing wins against Yakima Valley (16-4), Blue Mountain (14-9), and a close one against North Idaho (3-2).

The Cougars now turn their attention back to region play as they will visit Clark College on Saturday, April 23.