

COUGARS WORK TO BUILD PROGRAM



Cougar player Jake Dobecki gets ready for the pitch vs. Mt. Hood Community College on Sunday, April 24 at Sandy High School.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TRAVIS DAVID V WHITTAKER

"Here we go, Play Ball."

With lots of new faces on his team, second-year head baseball coach Jim Hoppel is looking for an identity for the Clackamas baseball program for many years to come.

With only four sophomores, Hoppel is asking his players to provide the leadership for the freshmen.

Last season the Cougars won eight more games than the prior season. Clackamas has an overall record of 5-20 and is 3-11 in league play. Hoppel likes the way his team is coming around this season.

"The freshmen are playing alright," Hoppel said. "It's a learning process for them, but they are picking up the pace and playing a lot better as of late. Our sophomores are bringing a lot of leadership to the young team. We are competing and getting better every day."

Before Hoppel was the head coach, he served as an assistant, co-head coach, and associate head coach for 14 years before getting the head coaching job last season.

During his second full season as a head coach, Hoppel feels that his season is as expected.

"I was told by other coaches that it would take some time to build the program back up and get the recruits that we want," Hoppel said. "In the next few years, we should be able to build the team back up and compete for a league title."

Sophomore first basemen Taylor Tibbets likes the way that things are going in practice.

"The team is getting more intense, and a lot of the other guys are starting to realize that they can win some games," Tibbets said.

One of the most important positions that is needed is the pitcher.

So far the Cougars' best pitcher has been right hander Drew Martin-Cohn.

In six games this season, he has thrown a total of 35 and 2/3 innings, striking out 15, earning an ERA (Earned Run Average) of 1.76 to go along with two complete games and an overall record of 2-2.

Sophomore left hander Chris Painter is one of the leaders for the pitching staff this season.

On game day, Painter likes to "Keep to himself, listen to music."

While on the mound Painter likes to stay out as long as possible.

So far this season in league play, Painter has thrown 29 and 2/3 of an inning, striking out 21 batters, earning an ERA of 3.64 and thrown a complete game shutout versus SW Oregon Community College.

Painter likes that he gets to work with pitching coach Jeff Lahti, who was the set-up man for the St. Louis Cardinals in the 1982 World Series when the Cardinals defeated the Milwaukee Brewers in seven games.

"It's really nice to work with someone who has a lot of knowledge on the game of baseball," said Painter.

The team has a lot of league play left, as they are just over the halfway point

of the season.

They still have a game with Mt. Hood Community College tentatively scheduled for Tuesday April 25. They also still have games with Linn Benton Community College on April 29 and 30, Lane Community College May 6 and 7, and at Lower Columbia Community College May 10 before they will play in their crossover tournament May 20 to 22 in Longview Washington.

"We want to finish on a positive note, keep our heads held high, get better every day, stay together as a team and compete to the end," said Hoppel.



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