

Freshmen hope for big wins

STORY AND PHOTO BY DOUG FRY

Coming off of a five-win season, the Clackamas Community College baseball team has high expectations for the spring of 2017. The Cougars have 12 returners on a 35-man roster. With new faces and a strong freshmen class, they are optimistic for the upcoming season.

In his third year as the skipper of the baseball team, coach Jim Hoppel sees their fall baseball season as a step in the right direction.

"We've had a very good fall, and guys were hitting the ball well," said Hoppel. "We played defense well. Pitching staff is going to be doing good. Our expectations, for all the coaches, is that we'll have a really good year."

Hitting coach Jackson Gillett was also very happy with the bats in fall ball compared to last season.

"We've got a lot of power this year," said Gillett. "We hit four home runs in five games, where we had two all of last year [spring] as a team."

With a freshmen-loaded roster, the Cougars' coaching staff plans to see immediate results knowing that success and winning is what their new recruits are used to.

"Most of our position guys will be starting freshmen," said Hoppel. "They'll be a little bit inexperienced, but a very talented group. They know how to win and they know how to play."

The recruiting class that came to Clackamas this year is comparable to many four-year universities, and the coaches plan to reflect that with their play on the field.

"We are so excited about the recruiting class that we've got coming in," said Gillett. "We talked to coaches from DI schools and they are often surprised when they hear about some of the guys we were able to get. So we are coming in with expectations to make the playoffs. We have a boatload of talent and hardworking, good kids."

Having prior ties to coach Gillett makes the transition to CCC easier for freshman Tyler Parker and his former high school teammates.

"Coach Gillett was the coach at Liberty for us for three years, so having those four former Liberty Falcons, we already know him," said Parker. "Also, he was a former Marine, so we [Parker and Gillett] have



The Clackamas baseball team practices in the infield on Monday, Feb. 13.

that connection there. With the four of us already having that connection, I think he expects a little more of us and for us to set the example of working hard."

After a year off from baseball, Parker has high expectations for his team.

"I took a year off and joined the Marines and got all my training done for that," said Parker. "Mostly, I'm just excited to get back to playing the sport I love. This year we have a really young team. We are going to try to grow at the start of the season and get to where we need to be to make a run at the NWAC tournament."

Fellow freshman Renner Stecki plans on making the most of his first year in college baseball and wants to improve as

an individual and as a team.

"I hope we grow as a team, win games and achieve the goals we've set for our season. I want to increase velocity in my pitching, keep consistent in the infield and improve my hitting," said Stecki. "I'm looking forward to getting my name out there."

The Cougars have all bought in to the goals the coaching staff has set and look forward to starting a new chapter in Clackamas baseball.

They will play their first set of games this season on March 4 against Pacific University and will begin league play on March 31 at home against Linn-Benton Community College.

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