# 2016 *ITEMIZER-OBSERVER* ALL-REGION SOFTBALL TEAM

## PITCHER

### Yasmine El-Hato
### Dallas

The senior pitcher/first baseman was a triple threat for the Dragons. At the plate, El-Hato led the Dragons in hits (47), home runs (6) and RBIs (50). As Dallas' top pitcher, she started 17 games, throwing 57 strikeouts with a 2.4 ERA. And at first base, El-Hato had a perfect fielding percentage. El-Hato was named the Mid-Willamette Conference's Player of the Year for her efforts. "Yasmine added a lot of senior leadership on our team on and off the field," Dallas coach Brandi Jackson said. "She came every day ready to work and pushed the team to the next level."

## INFIELD

### Kaelynn Simmons
### Dallas

Nash

As a freshman, Simmons stepped into a critical role for the Dragons. As a third baseman/pitcher, Simmons also served as the Dragons' lead off hitter. She more than met the challenge. She had just four strikeouts in 92 at-bats. On defense, she had a .919 fielding percentage. As a pitcher, she threw 36 strikeouts in 35 1/3 innings of work. Simmons earned first team all-league honors for her performance and she figures to be a key fixture for the Dragons for years to come. "Kaelynn is a natural born softball player," Jackson said. "She has the build, the heart and the passion to be successful in this sport. … She is one of those players who is constantly working to improve her game, even during the offseason, and it shows. She will be one to watch for in the next few years."

### Anna McGill
### Perrydale

The senior shortstop/catcher served as a team captain for the Pirates and was perhaps the team's most dangerous offensive weapon. McGill had a .455 batting average and a .560 on-base percentage. Once she reached a base, she was a nightmare for opponents, recording 31 stolen bases. Her leadership helped an inexperienced Pirates softball team develop and set the program up for future success.

McGill earned first team all-Special District 2 recognition.

### Kyra Noon
### Central

The junior infielder showed why she is one of the Panthers most dependable players in 2016. Noon hit .508 during league play and drove in 21 runs. Noon's ability to play second or third base made her a versatile asset for Central, one who could slide in wherever she was needed. She had a team-high 37 assists during MWC play and gave the Panthers a steady presence at the plate and on defense. Noon earned first team all-league recognition. "She was a solid third baseman and was very strong offensively for us as well," Central coach Kendra George said. "She made some outstanding progress from last year to this year."

### Jori Kerr
### Central

The junior made a difficult switch from outfield to infield prior to the start of the season. That didn't slow Kerr down at all. Kerr was a consistent threat at the plate, recording a team-high 37 hits, including seven triples and two home runs, and 38 RBIs during league play. She earned first team all-league honors for her performance. "Offensively, Jori led the team this year," George said. "She made a defensive transition from outfield to infield, which was challenging sometimes, but she did it without complaining and learned to make quick adjustments."

## OUTFIELD

### Emma Classen
### Dallas

Dallas relied on its fair share of inexperienced players during the 2016 season. Classen, a freshman, was one who rose to the occasion. The outfielder/pitcher hit .314 at the plate with 17 runs scored. She also pitched in nine games, throwing 20 strikeouts in 32 innings of work. Her willingness and ability to step up to the challenge and perform at the varsity level earned her second team all-league honors. "Emma is one of those kids who every coach wants on their team," Jackson said. "She comes in every day with a great attitude and gives 110 percent. It was fun to watch her grow over the season, and I can't wait to see what she brings next year."

### MaKena Linn
### Dallas

The senior outfielder's vast knowledge and experience made her a critical part to the Dragons' outfielders. She had 28 putouts, a high among Dallas outfielders and was a force at the plate, with a .458 on-base percentage. She also drew 12 walks, tied for the team high. Linn earned second team all-MWC honors. "One thing we all love about MaKena is her work ethic and love for the game," Jackson said. "She is one of those players that isn't necessarily a vocal leader, but leads by example every day. Kena has been the glue in the centerfield this year. Her knowledge of the game and experience in the outfield rubbed off onto whoever was playing next to her."

## UTILITY

### Mariah Hyre
### Central

Hyre came in as a freshman and showed just how valuable she will be to the Panthers going forward. Playing a number of different positions, Hyre had a .913 fielding percentage with just two errors during league play. She also had 24 hits, including 10 doubles, and 21 runs scored during conference season, earning first team all-league honors in the process. "She came in as a freshman and was a versatile player who makes quick adjustments," George said. "She had some game-saving defensive plays and offensively blew up for us the second half of the season."

## CATCHER

### Kylie Nash
### Central

Softball may not be Nash's primary sport, but the senior played a huge role for the Panthers in 2016. As the team's starting catcher, Nash had 82 putouts, 11 assists and just two errors, providing a steady hand behind the plate. As a hitter, Nash recorded 25 hits during league play with only four strikeouts. Once on base, Nash was a dangerous weapon, stealing six bases. She was also a vocal leader for the Panthers and earned first team all-MWC honors. "She was the best defensive player for Central," George said. "She was very quick on the bases for us and will be really missed."

### Ciara Greisen
### Dallas

Greisen, a senior, was late to the game for Dallas' softball team as 2016 marked her first season playing for the Dragons. But she made up for lost time with 27 hits and a perfect fielding percentage behind the plate. "We were very fortunate to have Ciara join DHS," Jackson said. "Coming in as a new senior, she was a great addition to our team and was a big part of our success this season. She is a wall behind the plate and her bat came around for us."

## COACH

### Brandi Jackson
### Dallas

In her first season, and her first varsity head coaching job, Jackson helped the Dragons have a spectacular season. Dallas went 19-9 overall and 17-7 in league play, finishing in third place. The Dragons then advanced to the state quarterfinals, defeating Sandy 9-1 in the first round of the state playoffs before falling to eventual state champion Churchill 6-0 in the quarterfinals round; a impressive start to her coaching career.

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*The 2016 all-region high school softball team was selected by Itemizer-Observer Sports Editor Lukas Eggen, along with heavy input from area coaches.*

# **Dallas:** El-Hato to attend Oregon State

**Continued from Page 10A**

By the time she arrived at Dallas High School, she was blossoming into one of the Mid-Willamette Conference's best players.

Her junior year in 2015 represented a big season for El-Hato.

She hit 12 home runs that season and was the Dragons' No. 1 pitcher.

Her offseason was spent playing and training in softball, and she entered the 2016 season expecting great things.

"I think, especially after last season when I hit 12 home runs, I felt like I had to live up to that," El-Hato said. "I realized that doesn't matter as much as getting on base, making plays and helping out the team."

Her home runs were down, but her batting average increased from about .420 in 2015 to .547 this season.

"I think I did more damage with those hits than with the home runs," she said.

She also excelled as the Dragons' go-to pitcher — something she attributes to her ability to forget the past and focus on the present.

"When you have a bad game, you have to control yourself, get over it and move on," El-Hato said. "You have to make sure you don't give up and you continue to get better."

What made her performance more impressive was battling injuries throughout the season.

"My ribs like to pop out and when I rotate, my (right) shoulder likes to dislocate sometimes," El-Hato said.

The results can be painful, but El-Hato has overcome.

By the time she entered her senior season, El-Hato was no longer the 10-year-old girl who couldn't hit or pitch. She was being recruited to play in college.

"I got recruited by two schools in California, one in Boston and one Division II school in West Virginia," El-Hato said.

After long consideration, El-Hato decided on her collegiate fate — and the decision may surprise some. El-Hato chose a school that didn't recruit her to play softball: Oregon State.

"I wanted to stay closer to home," she said. "Oregon State has a good program that I want to get into, and I may end up walking on or play intramural sports."

For now, she's not too worried about what comes next. She's taking in being a recent high school graduate and a spectacular season that saw the Dragons advance to the state quarterfinals.

"I'm most proud of being able to finish the season with such great girls," El-Hato said. "We didn't have any drama, had fun and got better as a whole."

LUKAS EGGEN/ Itemizer-Observer file

**Yasmine El-Hato was Dallas' top pitcher in 2016.**

For all her individual accomplishments, including being named the MWC's Player of the Year, it's the moments she spent time with friends that she'll remember most.

That, in the end, will be her greatest accomplishment, El-Hato said.

"Playing for Dallas, you're playing for the community. It's a way to give back," El-Hato said. "Being part of a team, that's so much fun. So many great memories come along with it."

# **Dream:** Alexander will attend camp in July

**Continued from Page 10A**

After discussing his options with coaches, friends and family, Alexander felt now was the time to try and make his basketball dreams come true.

Wanting to play professionally is something nearly all basketball players have dreamt about. Making that dream a reality can seem overwhelming.

According to statistics from the NCAA, 18,697 athletes played men's basketball at the collegiate level in 2016. About 12.2 percent, or just over 2,310 of those players, will turn professional in the United States or overseas.

Daunting odds for anyone, let alone for players from a Division II school.

But Alexander doesn't dwell on the statistics. He's focused on the positive: He has a chance to show what he can do.

Alexander will attend a camp in Las Vegas in mid-July.

"Basically you have overseas coaches and agents there looking at this selection of players," Alexander said. "Whether they are college athletes or other professional athletes trying to get a contract, you play in this camp and they will look at you."

### Going pro

- According to statistics from the NCAA, there were 18,697 student-athletes playing men's basketball across all divisions.
- Of those athletes, 12.2 percent of them, or about 2,310, are expected to play professional basketball in the United States or internationally.

Vegas is a fitting location for Alexander, who will be going all in on what is, for now, his only chance to impress potential suitors.

"I have to perform well to get something really beneficial for me as far as a contract goes," Alexander said.

With his playing career on the line, Alexander has been on an almost non-stop training routine.

Mondays are devoted to plyometrics — quick, powerful movements focused on increasing jump height and faster sprint times. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are basketball drill days, including everything from shooting to ball handling. Thursdays and Fridays are weight training days, along with at least an hour of shooting, and Saturdays vary depending on how his body feels.

Even Sundays, his "rest" days, aren't quite so relaxing.

"You want to put in the overtime and do more work," Alexander said.

The upcoming camp in Las Vegas provides the beginning of a new chapter. Alexander already has a long list of places he wants to go, including Germany and Italy.

But he's just hoping for a chance to travel anywhere.

"It feels like when you're coming out of high school all over again and deciding where do I want to go," Alexander said. "It's a good, nervous feeling. There's excitement, too. I'm ready to start my life."

But while July's camp provides an opportunity, there is also the chance for failure. If he fails to impress agents and international coaches, Alexander's basketball hopes would be on thin ice, at best. It's a reality he's considered, but isn't ready to accept.

"You can't get down," Alexander said. "It's a business now. You're getting paid to play well. I want to give it everything I got. Either it works out or it doesn't. As long as I have the opportunity, I'm happy."

# **Blue:** Duo excels at Albany

**Continued from Page 10A**

Applegate took third in the 50 backstroke (13-14).

For Applegate, his success in the backstroke was a bit of a surprise given just how hard he found it.

"It's hard because you can't see where you're going, so you might hit your head," he said.

Applegate, who also plays football and track and field, uses swimming as a way to crosstrain. But he's also found he's taken a liking to the thrill of meet days.

Meets are the culmination of hours of training. While practices can be difficult, to see it pay off in a race makes it all worth it.

"To race other people, it's so much fun," Applegate said.

For Diaz, living up to what her siblings accomplished proved to be a difficult task at first.

"It was a little harder because (my siblings) already had times recorded and were pretty good," Diaz said. "Trying to keep up with what they did was a little bit of a struggle."

It was when she decided to swim for herself that things began to change.

"Focusing on what I can do and not on what others can is important," Diaz said.

Perhaps the biggest surprise about swimming for Applegate and Diaz is the sense of community and the new friends they've made along the way.

In the end, that sense of community is what has kept them coming back.

"What surprised me is how much others actually help you," Diaz said. "We're like a family."

### Up Next

- The Blue Dolphins Swim Team will compete in the summer league in Corvallis on June 22.

**Solution on Page 2A**

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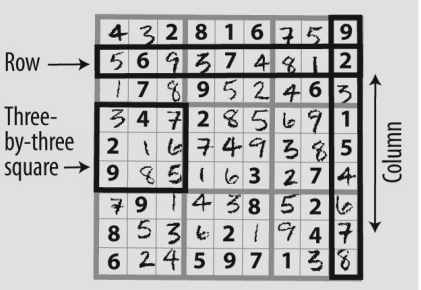
By Ben Arnoldy

## Sudoku

**Difficulty:** ★★★★☆




### How to do Sudoku

Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once in every column, row, and three-by-three square. See example above.

The Christian Science Monitor