

2017 ITEMIZER-OBSERVER ALL-REGION SOFTBALL TEAM



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer file

Central junior Erin Cole earned seven wins as a pitcher for the Panthers.

PITCHER

Kaelynn Simmons Dallas

In her first season as the Dragons' go-to pitcher, Simmons exploded onto the scene with a stellar performance. Simmons went 18-1 in 20 appearances. Simmons threw 128 strikeouts over 117 2/3 innings with a 1.4 ERA. Simmons earned Mid-Willamette Conference Pitcher of the Year, first team all-league and first team all-state and 5A all-state pitcher of the year honors. At the plate, Simmons hit .453 with 39 hits, three home runs and 27 RBIs. Only a sophomore, Simmons figures to be a force in the league and state and will be part of the core the Dragons will build around for years to come.

INFIELD

Olivia Nelson Dallas

Nelson was one of only a few seniors on the Dragons' roster during the 2017 season but she was a critical part of Dallas' success. The short stop had a .956 fielding percentage and was a force at the plate. Nelson had 41 hits, 39 runs scored and 25 RBIs while hitting .432. Once on base, she was always a threat, recording 11 stolen bases — but Nelson's leadership and true impact went far beyond her success on the field. Nelson earned first team all-MWC honors and third team all-state recognition. She was also named to the 2017 Senior All-Star game and was voted best teammate by her teammates.

Jori Kerr Central

Kerr, a senior, played both infield and outfield for the Panthers during the 2017 season. Her versatility was part of the reason she was one of Central's leaders. Kerr had a .932 fielding percentage with 32 put outs. She was also an offensive force. Kerr hit .529 at the plate with a .548 on-base percentage. Kerr recorded 36 hits, including two home runs and three triples, and 38 RBIs with five stolen bases. Kerr received first team all-MWC honors for her performance.

Sydney Nash Central

Nash may only have been a freshman, but she proved to be a key part to Central's run to the state play-in round as the team's starting short stop. On defense, Nash was a steady hand. At the plate, Nash recorded 30 hits with 30 runs scored and 13 RBIs and a .571 on-base percentage. She also had six stolen bases. Nash earned first team all-league honors and figures to become a central role for the Panthers' long-term success.

Jayden Wynia Dallas

The junior second baseman was one of several Dragons who came up big in clutch moments throughout the 2017 season. Wynia formed part of a potent infield and defensive unit that held opponents to 107 total runs — the lowest mark in the MWC. On offense, Wynia hit .411. Once she reached base, her speed made her dangerous. Wynia had 11 stolen bases and scored 26 times. Wynia earned second team all-league recognition for her efforts.

OUTFIELD

Emma Classen Dallas

The sophomore outfielder had her presence felt in a big way. Dippel was Dallas' Player of the Game at the state championship game after recording one hit and three RBIs. For the season, Classen hit .333 with a .416 on-base percentage with 20 RBIs and seven stolen bases. Classen received an all-MWC honorable mention for her efforts.

Jordan Dippel Dallas

Dippel, a junior, formed part of a formidable outfield group that was one of the Dragons' strengths throughout the 2017 season, but Dippel was much more than just a strong arm. She hit .402 at the plate with 25 RBIs and had a

team-high 41 runs scored. She also had nine stolen bases and hit a pair of home runs and had two triples. Dippel earned all-league honorable mention and should only grow as a bigger offensive threat during her senior season in 2018.

Kassidy Noon Central

The sophomore outfielder is part of a young core that Central can build around for years to come. Noon, who played both right and center field, had a perfect fielding percentage with 15 put outs and no errors. At the plate, Noon, who earned first team all-MWC recognition, hit .508 with a .597 on-base percentage and recorded 30 hits and scored 29 runs. Noon already provides the Panthers with one of the league's top outfielders and should only improve with time.

UTILITY

Erin Cole Central

Cole, a junior, played a variety of positions for the Panthers during the 2017 season. As a pitcher, Cole had seven wins, including one shutout, and threw 55 strikeouts. She also had a .939 fielding percentage. At the plate, Cole hit .433 with 26 hits, including three home runs, and 31 RBIs. Cole was named first team all-MWC for her efforts.

CATCHER

Lauren Wallace Dallas

Dallas' softball team had no shortage of talent during the 2017 season and Wallace, a junior, established herself as a leader. The first team all-league selection and MWC Co-Player of the Year hit .579 with a .619 on-base percentage. Wallace had 55 hits, including 16 doubles and eight home runs, 50 RBIs. She was also a rock behind the plate, forming a dominating duo with pitcher Kaelynn Simmons. Wallace had a .995 fielding percentage and caught 10 of 43 runners stealing.

COACH

Brandi Jackson Dallas

In her second season leading the Dragons, Jackson helped Dallas go on a magical run during the 2017 campaign. Under her guidance, the Dragons finished 18-0 in league play and earned the No. 1 seed in the state playoffs. Dallas advanced the state title game after defeating Parkrose, Lebanon and Silverton in the first three rounds of the state playoffs.

The 2017 all-region high school softball team was selected by Itemizer-Observer Sports Editor Lukas Eggen, along with heavy input from area coaches.



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

Dallas junior Lauren Wallace hit eight home runs during the 2017 season.

Wallace: Plans to play at Central Washington

Continued from Page 10A

Softball began as more of an inevitability than a choice for Wallace.

"My mom was a really avid softball player," she said. "I was sort of put there to begin with way back in kindergarten."

By the time she reached middle school, softball had transformed from a fun diversion to full blown obsession — so much so that she began planning her softball future.

"I took it upon myself in like middle school," Wallace said. "I thought about things like I have to take these classes in order to be able to go to a Division I university or I was choosing what I wanted to major in and thinking maybe I'll take this

class and it will look better. I tend to overthink a little bit, but I was planning my whole entire life since middle school."

Wallace joined traveling softball teams and worked with various coaches to improve her overall game.

The last few years her focus became more refined.

"I was going back and forth between pitcher and catcher," Wallace said. "I realized there are so many pitchers out there who are good. I wanted to excel at being a catcher. There aren't too many catchers who are really solid and amazing. I spent 20 hours a week working mainly on catching."

Wallace said as of now, she is committed to playing softball at Central Washing-

ton University.

"I was at a tournament last summer and two coaches said they would sign me right now if they could," Wallace said. "It's a gorgeous campus and it's everything I would want."

Seeing her softball plans come together was a momentous occasion and the result of years of dedication.

"It's a weight off your shoulders," Wallace said. "I don't have to worry about applying to colleges and wondering if they even want me."

But college is for after high school. Wallace plans on making her senior season even more impressive than the last.

Wallace was used to being

on top of the softball world. She won a state title as a sophomore in Washington.

After moving to Dallas last year, she had no idea what she was getting into.

"I didn't know anything about the school," Wallace said.

In a stroke of good fortune, Dallas was looking for a new starting catcher. Wallace wasn't about to let this chance pass her by.

"I met (coach) Brandi Jackson over the summer to get to know her," Wallace said. "I talked to (pitcher) Kaelynn (Simmons) a lot before the season started. Building that bond is huge. You have to have that trust. The pitcher has to know you have their back no matter what."

There also has to be enough trust so that in certain situations Wallace can call timeout to calm a pitcher down or give a tip.

The chemistry and trust between Simmons and Wallace was apparent throughout.

Simmons went 18-1 and both received numerous accolades and Dallas advanced to the state championship game.

"Lauren was a perfect addition to our team this year," Jackson said. "She always comes with a smile on her face and her bubbly personality is refreshing. Lauren's heart, dedication and passion for the game of softball is seen by all those around her."

But the thing that's affect-

ed her most wasn't any accomplishment on the field. It's the support the team received off it.

"The community is more gelled together than it ever was where I used to live," Wallace said. "I've never been around this kind of community. Knowing they are behind you no matter what is so reassuring."

Wallace believes the Dragons are just getting started. With a vast majority of the roster set to return in 2018, Dallas appears to be set up for another successful season — and Wallace will likely be at the core of that success once again.

"I think people don't expect this town to have this amount of talent," Wallace said.

Camp: No cost to attendees

Continued from Page 10A

Select Western Oregon players are also scheduled to help lead the camp, which is aimed at quarterbacks, wide receivers, tight ends and running backs. All campers will receive a T-shirt.

"We've got some coaches who will be able to help," Williams said. "We'll teach some of the basic stuff and some of the little things and tricks that

we've learned. I want to share some knowledge on how to get to the next level. It will be a cool experience and a lot of fun and there will be a lot of competition."

Williams will also share his knowledge of what he's seen from his journey from Division II college to starting NFL receiver.

Williams led the Los Angeles Chargers in receptions and yards during the

2016-17 season and will be looking to build on that success this fall.

But the camp will provide an opportunity to give back to the community he treasures and take a little break before the grind of the NFL season begins again.

"It will be nice to be home for a little bit," he said. "I'll see family and friends and see some of my old coaches. I'll be

working out still, but it will be nice to get away."

When Williams takes the field at Western, it will be just like the old days — except that this time, he's the NFL player that kids will be looking up to.

"It hasn't really hit me that that's the position I'm in, but I'm happy that I can bring that to a small town and give kids that opportunity," Williams said.

Miller: Chosen in the 23rd round

Continued from Page 10A

Miller was named to the first team all-Great Northwest Athletic Conference team after earning five wins in 10 starts during the 2017 season Miller had a 3.50 ERA and threw one complete game.

He led the Wolves in innings pitched (54) and strikeouts (57), including

throwing nine strikeouts during the GNAC Championship title game.

"We are excited for Brady," WOU coach Kellen Walker said. "He has great stuff and has always had aspirations of playing at the next level. It's great for the program as well to have another guy that will have the opportunity to play professionally."

Registration for tennis tourney continues

Itemizer-Observer staff report

MONMOUTH/INDEPENDENCE — Sign-ups for the Monmouth-Independence Fourth of July Tennis Tournament have started.

This year's tournament will take place July 1 and 2 at Central High School and Western Oregon University. Cost is \$15 for singles and \$25 for doubles.

different brackets for different skill levels.

Central boys tennis coach Patti Youngren helps organize the tournament each year and said the mix of skill levels makes the tournament an enjoyable experience for everyone.

"It's fun to see them competing and mixing together off-season," Youngren said. "Seeing the

faces of those who come back every year and listening to the stories of friends who connect on the courts is amazing."

The deadline to enter is June 27.

Playing times and locations will be available once registration closes.

Make checks payable to M.I.T., 1040 Monmouth St., Independence, 97351.

For more information: Patti Youngren, 503-507-5760.

"Tennis is a wholesome way to get to know your neighbors," Youngren said. "Tennis is something the whole family can do. It's a fun experience because of the community of tennis players. Many players have played in this tournament for a number of years. It's

Tennis Time

What: Monmouth-Independence Fourth of July Tennis Tournament.

When: July 1 and 2.

Where: Matches will take place at Western Oregon University and Central High School.

Cost: \$15 singles, \$25 doubles.

How to register: Contact Patti Youngren, 503-507-5760.

great to get together. It's a great time for newcomers because it is low-keyed."