

## Signal Sports

## Seaside softball sees improvements in spring 2015

## Head coaches plan to build on fundamentals next season

By Katherine Lacaze  
Seaside Signal

Seaside softball's season officially ended in a 14-1 loss to Douglas in the 4A Regional Play-in contest May 22 to qualify for the softball state playoffs, but by several measurements, the season was a success for a team that had not been to the postseason for 35 years.

The Lady Gulls entered the 2015 season with a win average of just more than 7 percent in league play for the previous eight seasons. The team's record in 2014 was 5-20 overall and 0-15 in the Cowapa League.

When co-head coaches Bill Westerholm and Jon Hotchkiss took the reins, they found themselves faced throughout the season with the responsibility of introducing the girls to basic game situations and teaching them how to make routine plays. To some of the players, it was completely new material, Hotchkiss said, although he could not speak as to "why?"

"We had very few girls that had played any competitive ball," he said.

Regardless, those issues had to be, and were, addressed in a season the Lady Gulls finished with a 6-9 record in Cowapa and 9-16 overall, including their play-in contest loss.

Since the Lady Gulls haven't been to a state playoff in more than three decades, the team made that its goal, according to senior catcher Allison Bussert, who has been on the team four years. Additionally, they adopted Hotchkiss' enthusiasm for the motto: "One Team, One Dream."



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Senior catcher Allison Bussert and senior infielder Brianna Babbitt received both the "coaches award," for being team leaders, and the "most inspirational award," voted on by all team members, for the 2015 spring softball season. The Seaside Lady Gulls held their team awards ceremony June 1 at the high school's library.

"It was a way for us to focus and know what we were working toward," Bussert said.

In order to accomplish the goal of making playoffs, Westerholm said, they knew they had to garner at least two wins against each Astoria, Tillamook and Valley Catholic. Doing so allowed the Lady Gulls to edge out those three schools to take third place in Cowapa behind Banks and Scappoose.

## Positive changes

As with most leadership transitions, the Seaside players had to adjust to Westerholm and Hotchkiss' coaching styles but, after that happened, "as a program, we started to improve fundamentally," Westerholm said.

"As the season went on, we started to become a pretty good softball team," he said, noting that, even with an overall losing record, "it was the start of something."

Because of the program's former struggles, the coaches recognized the need to

build up the players and infuse the team with positive morale.

"These girls lacked confidence in softball," Hotchkiss said.

The team lost 11 of their first 15 games, but things started coming together during a 3-9 loss to Valley Catholic in late April. The improvements "really showed through," Hotchkiss said, during the team's double-header at Astoria on May 1. The Lady Gulls split their last 10 games between wins and losses.

Bussert agreed one of the biggest transitions this season was a shift in the team's mentality, or "the broadening of our minds and our perspective on what we can do."

The improvement in performance — for all players — was noticeable this spring, Westerholm said. But the season also was marked by success in other ways. While the girls had issues on-field at times, the coaches didn't have to worry about the players off the



KATHERINE LACAZE PHOTO

Three players from Seaside High School's softball team. Junior center fielder Paige Ideue, junior shortstop Whitney Westerholm and freshman pitcher Jetta Ideue were selected for the all-league team.

field. They didn't get calls about the girls skipping class or receiving worrisome grades. In fact, the Lady Gulls were No. 1 in the state 4A division academically, meaning they collectively had the highest grade-point average at 3.7.

Additionally, the team's camaraderie was evident during its end-of-season awards banquet, held at the high school June 1. Junior Paige Ideue, freshman Jetta Ideue and junior Whitney Westerholm were selected for the all-league team.

Coach Westerholm and Hotchkiss distributed the traditional "coaches awards" to two seniors, Bussert and Brianna Babbitt, who they believe were team leaders and consistently carried the voice of the coaches to the players. Those students also were selected for the "most inspirational awards," voted on by all team members. The hope, coach Westerholm said, is that "some younger kids will see and fill those shoes."

In addition, the coaches let the players list what award they would give, if they could, and to whom. Bussert was recognized for being the funniest player and having the worst puns, as the "softball mom" and also "just because she's frickin' awesome." Brianna Babbitt was picked as most competitive; her sister, freshman outfielder Bryre Babbitt, as hardest working. The awards ceremony was a glimpse into the team's spirit and the way in which they pulled together as one team, with one dream.

## Looking ahead

Of the 11 players listed on the team's varsity roster, three are seniors: Bussert, Brianna Babbitt and third-baser Shelby Miller. The team's primary pitcher this season, Jetta Ideue, is a freshman — and one of the reasons the team was successful, coach Westerholm said. Freshman Sequoia Shand also pitched some at the junior varsity level and will continue throwing, he said. Sophomore Emma

Dutcher got some catching experience to make her a viable replacement for Bussert.

In addition to a full varsity lineup, the team also had enough players for the junior varsity roster, and some filled roles and helped at the varsity level when needed. Coaches Kayla Griess and Codie Evans will continue coaching junior varsity next year. Both coach Westerholm and Hotchkiss also plan to return for the 2015-16 season.

"Personally, I loved it," said Hotchkiss, who is an assistant coach for the school's football team, as well. "It was a great, great experience."

They are encouraging the players to use the summer to continue their improvement by attending camps and workshops, practicing as a team on Sundays through June and playing on an Oregon Amateur Softball Association 14U team if they are eligible.

"We're just going to keep getting better the more we practice, the more we play, the more we compete," Hotchkiss said.



## Hats off to the Class of 2015

Graduation is \_\_\_\_\_  
a time of joy,  
a time of great pride,  
a time of looking back at past achievements,  
and a time of looking forward to new beginnings.

Congratulations and many blessings to the Class of 2015.

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