

Batter Up

Mustangs softball season opens up full of promise and hope

BOBBY MORRIS
SPORTS EDITOR

Five years ago, there wasn't much talk around campus about the women's softball team. There wasn't an MSU softball field, and Coach Brady Tigert wasn't the softball coach. This was all due to the fact that there wasn't even a softball team on Midwestern's campus.

Now, looking back, it seems like a distant, forgotten memory. The softball team earned a spot in the NCAA Division II regional tournament, for the fourth consecutive year. For those of you counting, that's four out of their first four seasons in existence.

Not to mention the Mustangs are looking to secure their third straight Lone Star Conference title, after claiming back-to-back Lone Star Conference tournament champion-

ships to go along with their three consecutive LSC North divisional crowns.

Others around the LSC must agree, as the Mustangs received nine out of sixteen first-place votes to favor them, along with the Angelo State Rambelles, to win their respective divisions in all of the pre-season polls.

All-American third baseman, Kristen Stonecipher, who led the team in batting average, slugging percentage, on-base percentage, runs scored, total bases, and RBIs was also named the LSC North Division Preseason Player of the Year.

MSU relied on pitching and a solid line-up last year to post a 44-16 record, and will rely on much of that talent returning in order to secure their next division crown and return to the NCAA Division II regional tournament.

Senior left-hander Ashley Kuchenski brings a wealth of experience, returning inside the circle that has never been seen at MSU before. Kuchenski holds a 36-13 career record, while providing stable pitching, while, Midwestern's young star out of Plano West High School isn't on the field.

The dazzling sophomore, Katie Peterson, sprang onto the LSC scene last season and baffled many of her opponents.

She set a program record for shutouts in a season with nine, and held the opponents' batting average to, a true freshman record, .206.

Peterson garnered first-team All-Lone Star Conference North division and freshman of the year honors, as she posted a 25-12 record, a 2.03 ERA, and more than a five-to-one strikeout-to-walk ratio in a little more than 241 innings.

Rounding out the hurlers is a true freshman that led her team to the Class 3A championship game last year. Brittany Tanner, a right-hander from Burkburnett, was awarded All-State honors while leading the team to the state championship game, last year.

Even with all of their talent in the circle, it's very hard to distinguish where the Mustangs' strength really lies: the pitching circle or with their very potent and experienced offensive attack.

The previously mentioned Stonecipher only highlights a talented line-up that includes former NJCAA All-American and NFCA all-region, Lindsey Voigt.

Voigt, a senior catcher, transferred from Vernon College prior to last season and showed off all the skills it took to help lead the team to the conference championship,

with Stonecipher. She hit .365 last season, including eight homers. Voigt also shows a unique mix of speed and power rarely seen from catchers, best evident in her ten steals and team-best thirteen sacrifice bunts.

After hitting much of last season from the middle-to-beginning part of the line-up, Tigert recognized all of Voigt's abilities, and he made the decision to move his catcher to the leadoff spot entering the 2008 season.

Jessica Rodriguez, a junior first baseman, also returns to the starting lineup, solidifying the middle of the Mustangs' order. Rodriguez drove in 42 runs, second to only Stonecipher, last season, while slamming eight home runs and hitting .328.

Newcomer to the Mustangs' cause is a true freshman transfer, Amanda Potysman, who will bat

clean-up and play in left field after spending the fall semester at NCAA Division I Central Arkansas.

Expectations are very lofty for such a young team, but Tigert is more than confident in his team's potential to make noise from the Lone Star Conference, despite the fact that more than one-third of their roster are freshman.

The Mustangs will open up their 2008 campaign this Friday afternoon in San Antonio at the Fourth Annual St. Mary's Division II Collegiate Class.

They will open against Southern Arkansas at 11:15 a.m., and then battle Incarnate Word at 1:30 p.m.

MSU then moves on to play Tarleton State and Eastern New Mexico on Saturday, before finishing up against the host St. Mary's University on Sunday afternoon.

Thomas hired as offensive coach for Atlanta Falcons

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Ever since Glenn Thomas took over the reigns as offensive coordinator, at the ripe age of 25, the Mustangs have set the bar for offensive proficiency, averaging more than 465 yards of total offense per game. So much, in fact, that over the past two seasons the Mustangs football team has led all NCAA Division II schools in total regular season yardage.

There were people watching the Mustangs gallop up and down the field, obviously, as newly hired offensive coordinator for the Atlanta Falcons, Mike Mularkey, hired Thomas over the weekend to the vacant position of offensive quality control coach.

Thomas will join a relatively new staff, set up by veteran offensive coordinator, Mularkey, to help retool and rebuild a struggling and controversy-ridden Falcons franchise.

"Glenn did a great job for us as proven by our offensive productivity. He's a good coach, a great person, and an even better friend," said MSU head coach Bill Maskill. "We're excited about his opportunity. It's not often for a coach his age to get this kind of opportunity."

Maskill took a chance on Thomas four years ago when he announced Thomas as the offensive coordinator, but the gutsy move to appoint such a young coach as offensive coordinator paid dividends

from the very beginning.

The team's offensive production climbed steadily over each of Thomas's first four years as offensive coordinator, before spiking last season with a school record 549.4 yards per game.

Thomas led an offense, which produced Midwestern's first and only first-team All-American, Daniel Polk. Another tribute to Thomas's efficiency was the fact that his star quarterback was the only play-caller in the entire NCAA to post

more than 2,000 yards passing, while still running for over 1,000 yards, causing opposing defensive coordinators to have nightmares.

Thomas graduated from Texas Tech in 2001, after serving all four of his under-graduate years as a student assistant for the Red Raiders, one of NCAA Division I's most potent offenses.

He then served as a graduate assistant, coaching the wide receivers at MSU for three years. He coached the wide receivers until Coach

Maskill appointed him as the offensive coordinator, in 2004.

Since Thomas's graduation, he has interned at a couple of professional franchises, coaching wide receivers with the Baltimore Ravens from 2001-05 and with the Jacksonville Jaguars last season.

He will begin his coaching responsibilities immediately for Mularkey in Atlanta, as Midwestern's search for a new offensive coordinator begins.

Mustangs out-hustle Wildcats, 85-63

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Despite playing against a much deeper and less fatigued squad, last Saturday, the women's basketball team rode the hot hand of guard Brandy Moore and dominated the Abilene Christian Wildcats, eventually winning a lop-sided affair, 85-63.

The win boosted Midwestern's overall record to 8-9 and 2-2 in conference play, to equal Abilene Christian's record in both categories.

Moore led the team in scoring with a career-high 25 points, while shooting over 50 percent from the field, including a game-high four three-pointers made. The Mustangs defensively suffocated the Wildcats from the tip-off holding them to 35 percent shooting from the field and hardly any transition baskets on the night.

Even though ACU had an obvious advantage with their deep bench, the Mustangs' shortened bench, which featured all eight active players from their roster, appeared more fresh and active throughout the game, even towards the end of the second half they were still out-hustling the Wildcats.

A slow start from the Mustangs gave the Wildcats initial hopes with a quick six-point lead in the opening minutes of play, but after Moore and senior guard Stacey Staten dug them out of the deficit, MSU took hold of the lead halfway through the first half and never let off the gas pedal.

MSU took the momentum and translated it into a 44-33 lead at intermission, and kept it going after the half.

The Mustangs went on to simply overpower ACU in the second half, extending the lead to as much as 23 points, before it went final, 85-63.

Other top scorers for the Mus-



block. She also played most of the game sitting out only a couple of minutes towards the end of the blowout victory.

Kristee Davidson and Audrey Maxwell led the Wildcats in defeat, with eleven and ten points, respectively, Maxwell also pulled down a game-high eleven boards.

A week ago the Mustangs were dealt an equally lop-sided defeat when they visited the First United Bank Center in Canyon, Texas to take on the No. 18 West Texas A&M Lady Buffs.

The Lady Buffs cruised to a 72-51 victory, which featured a 22-0 run by WTAMU, extending from the first half into the second half. This win pushed the Lady Buff's home court winning streak to a remarkable forty games.

Sophomore Brittney Smith knocked down a 15-foot jumper from the baseline with a little more than five minutes left in the first half. This would be the last field goal for the Mustangs for the next 7:45, representing the longest drought of that kind for the last three years.

The Mustangs held All-American guard Emily Brister in check all night, as she only managed thirteen points, six rebounds, and six assists. Joni Unruh, Jamie Dreiling, and Courtney Lee picked up the slack for WTAMU all finishing in double-digits on the night.

Moore was the leading scorer for MSU, again, finishing with eighteen points, including another four treys, while Morrison finished with seventeen points and three treys of her own.

The Mustangs' next game is against Angelo State and is set to tip-off at 6 p.m. in the Junell Center/Stephens Arena in San Angelo. The contest can be heard live on 100.9 BOB FM, bobradio.fm, or on the MSU athletics Web site at msumustangs.com. Broadcast is scheduled to start

at 5:45 p.m. and will continue to cover the men's game after this game goes final.

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