

Spring predictions: Golf potential champs, Women's LAX buoyed by strong defense

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Here we go, Quaker Nation. It's once again the spring semester, and this year's athletic schedules are packed with more than enough action to keep you on the edge of your seats. Been slacking with your own Quaker coverage? No problem. I am back to bring you the inside scoop, and maybe even dazzle you with some possibly preposterous predictions. Let's get started, shall we ...

Baseball

Overview: This year, Quakers look to rebound from their 14-23 campaign a year ago with a steady blend of senior leadership and underclassmen talent. The addition of full-time pitching coach, Daniel Hadra, has quickly solidified the pitching staff while the newly completed Maynard Batting Center has provided its own advantages and will certainly benefit the offense this spring.

Don't sleep on 'em: Although the Guilford baseball players haven't been showered with love in the preseason polls, the team has high expectations for the upcoming season. Guilford's main strength this year are its 11 seniors, led by undisputed offensive juggernaut, Kyle Wooden, who has led the team in RBIs the past two seasons. The Quakers look poised to make a run amidst the sea of doubters, as they continue rolling after a emotional win this past weekend against perennial power Piedmont.

They said it: "Our whole team lives at the field and all of us cannot wait to get the season underway," said Wooden. "We are going to shock some teams that perennially get the best of us."

The final call: (24-16; 9-9 ODAC)

Although the Quakers may appear less talented than in years past, there is a new attitude present amongst the team. I expect this new mantra to carry the Quakers all the way to Lynchburg for their first conference tournament appearance since 2006.

Golf

Overview: The men's golf team is already battle-tested. Because they benefit from playing a fall and spring season, the Quakers have been in action since newly-hired Corey Maggard took over the program in August 2010. New coach, same outcome. Guilford currently sits number one in the polls after an unblemished fall, and looks the favorite to make a run for yet another D-III national championship.

Dynamic Duo: The Quakers look to sophomore Noah Ratner and junior Matt Hennick to continue carrying the brunt of the load this spring. Ratner led the team in stroke average this fall with a startling 72.3, while Hennick remained hot on his heels with a 72.5 stroke average of his own. Ratner and Hennick also account for two of Maggard's three golfers who have scored under 70 this season, the other being junior Dusty Roberts.

They said it: "The guys know they kind of have a target

on their back, but all of us are out there everyday gearing up and preparing to the bring the trophy home in the end," said Maggard.

The final call: don't be at all surprised if the Quakers find their way back into the NCAA National Championships. In fact, don't be totally shocked if they win the whole thing. I'm giving them the early edge, especially since the tournament is held in our own backyard at the Grandover Resort.

Softball

Overview: The Guilford softball Quakers are, without question on the right path under head-man Dennis Shores. When Shores took over in 2007, the softball program was consistently on the bottom end of the ODAC standings. Since then, Shores has done nothing but steadily improve the number of wins each season, culminating a best 28-win season a year ago.

Full House: Look for the softball squad to be yet again loaded with talent. The ladies lost just two players from last year's record-setting season and also return First Team All-ODAC selection Kimberly Keys. Also coming back is the Quaker's power-threat in senior Julie Langseth, the team's leader in home runs last season. Jessica Burcham and Shelby Bowser both return to add a veteran pitching-attack to the total package.

They said it: "We just need to be disciplined, as a team, in our approach, so we can stay focused for the entire season and hopefully bring back an ODAC Championship in the process," said Langseth.

The final call: (29-7; 14-4 ODAC)

The softball team exudes confidence. And as well they should. I expect them to continue winning during the 2011 season. Although softball will face off with perennial foes Bridgewater and Roanoke on the road, Shores and the Quakers will turn heads again and bring home an ODAC title in the process.

Women's Lacrosse

Overview: The women's lacrosse team enters the 2011 campaign with a firm grasp on their new identity, working around the graduation of three major offensive contributors. The Quakers will thus aim for a more balanced offensive attack, pressuring defenses with longer possessions and fewer turnovers. The team's second-leading scorer from last season, junior Summer Frazier, returns to help senior attackers Hannah Merrell and Kaitlin Feeney stabilize the offense.

Defense Wins Championships: Another stark difference between this year and last is the heightened focus on defense. Junior Kathryn Carella has emerged as the defense's vocal leader, and must work in unison with experienced defenders Sarah Bradburd and Meaghan Dill in order to anchor the black half of the field. The defense also has the luxury of a game-changing caliber goalkeeper in sophomore Liza Mettler.

They said it: "It comes down to defense, possession and

transition," said head coach Matt Grosso. "That is our focus, and if we can do those things I think we will really surprise some teams this year."

The final call: (8-8; 4-4 ODAC)

Don't expect offensive shootouts like in years past. The Quakers will keep games more manageable with better defense, but will also sorely miss the scoring triumvirate from last season.

Men's Lacrosse

Overview: The men's lacrosse team is, without a doubt, under construction. In fact, last year's 3-13 season is a distant memory and first-year head coach Tom Carmean is already hard at work helping his team to forget the past while also getting them mentally-prepared to face a powerful ODAC conference.

Right Frame of Mind: The players have already begun to respond to the upbeat and positive attitude of Carmean, an 11-year professional player himself. In addition to an established mutual trust, Carmean holds a balanced diet of experienced seniors and talented first-years. Leading the charge will be junior Chris Sisk, the team's second-leading scorer from a year ago, and a much-improved goalie in senior Mark Guillen.

The final call: (6-10; 2-5 ODAC)

It would really be one of those "Rocky" type efforts for the Quakers to make a run at the title this year, but I certainly expect them to progress and move forward. Coach Carmean is steering them in the right direction.

Track & Field

Overview: Both the men's and women's track and field teams are already off and running ... yes, pun intended. In just its third season, the track and field program continues to build by bringing in a talented class of first-years. This year, it is first-year Taylor Stokes, a distance runner for the women, who has already made her mark on the Guilford record books. For the men, first-year Jonathan Smith has jumped on the scene quickly, and has already set a school record in the 200-meter dash.

Maybe there is an 'I' in team: For neither the men's nor women's teams have the Quakers posted a team score this season. Individually, however, Guilford track and field is beginning to make its mark. Stokes, who placed in the South/Southeast Regional Championship this past fall, broke school records in the mile and 3K. On the men's side, first-year Michael Mellinger emerged in the 400-meter dash with a time of 52.49 seconds, also a new school record. First-year Dylan Skinner legged out a season-low 4:33 mile time, good enough for 23rd overall and also proving the lowest time for any D-III contestant.

They said it: "We're pretty close as a team...and with good workouts each week, we are getting better all the time," said Stokes. "If we maintain and stay healthy, then we will come

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What's Going On in Guilford Sports...

LAST WEEK'S GAMES AND MATCHES

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Feb. 9 GUILFORD 68 Washington and Lee 57*

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Feb. 4 GUILFORD 65 Randolph-Macon 82*

Feb. 5 GUILFORD 68 Virginia Wesleyan 55*

BASEBALL

Feb. 6 GUILFORD 0 Piedmont 19

Feb. 7 GUILFORD 12 Piedmont 3

Feb. 9 Guilford 2 Methodist 5

MEN'S LACROSSE

Feb. 5 GUILFORD 6 Catawba 9!

Key: *-ODAC match !-Scrimmage Home Team in CAPS

UPCOMING GAMES AND MATCHES

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Feb. 12 GUILFORD v Randolph*

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Feb. 11 GUILFORD v Washington and Lee*

Feb. 12 GUILFORD v Lynchburg*

SWIMMING

Feb. 11,12,13 ODAC/ Atlantic States Championships

BASEBALL

Feb. 10 GUILFORD v Bluefield State

Feb. 12 GUILFORD v Southern Virginia

WOMEN'S AND MEN'S TENNIS

Feb. 12 GUILFORD v Winston-Salem State

Feb. 13 GUILFORD v Greensboro

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S TRACK AND FIELD

Feb. 12 Vince Brown Invitational