

SPORTS WEEK

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APRIL 30, 2015

WSSU baseball, softball teams primed for CIAA tournaments



Photo by Craig T. Greenlee
Rams catcher Connor Andrus leads the CIAA with 39 RBIs.

BY CRAIG T. GREENLEE
FOR THE CHRONICLE

The regular season is a done deal for Winston-Salem State University's baseball and softball teams.

Now comes the time of year that both squads have been waiting for. The CIAA championships in both sports begin today (Thursday, April 30) at their respective sites. The three-day tournaments are scheduled to end on Saturday (May 2).

The top-seeded Rams (32-13) are considered prohibitive favorites to win the conference baseball championships being played at the USA Baseball Complex in Cary. Entering the final week of the season, WSSU was ranked 25th in Collegiate Baseball's national polls for Division II.

In softball, the Lady Rams didn't post a winning record overall, but they did finish 13-3 in the conference. The ladies are confident that their strong non-conference schedule has prepared them well for the conference tournament being played at the Walnut Creek Softball Complex in Raleigh.

Rams' redemption

The Rams, who were 12-1 in league play, went into nosedive mode in late March/early April and lost six games straight. As things turned out, the losing streak proved to be a blip on the radar screen.



Coach Kevin Ritsche's squad recovered nicely and closed with a 10-1 mark over the final weeks of the regular season.

WSSU has no problems pushing runs across the plate. Connor Andrus, who has a .378 batting average, leads the league with 39 RBIs. Three of his teammates (Dylan Dombrowskas, Des Roberts and Alex Grubb) rank among the CIAA's Top 10 in that category.

Rams pitching has delivered in spades. Aaron Hatch, Sam Burton, Jordan Carlton, Eric Corlette, Jordan Cummings and Devin McLemore have a combined won-loss record of 29-13. As a pitching staff, WSSU leads the league in strikeouts (8.38 per game) and has the CIAA's lowest ERA at 4.02.

If the regular season is any indication, the Rams should be in good position to win their fourth tournament championship in as many years. The only blemish on their conference record is a 5-3 loss to Chowan in mid-March. Over the course of the CIAA season, the Rams haven't been pushed to the limit very often. Out of 13 league games, they've only been involved in one-run games twice.

The closest challenger appears to be Virginia State, a team that the Rams handled easily in a 13-0 victory last Saturday. Burton went the distance and held the Trojans to two hits for the day.

Nathan Steger led Winston-Salem State's 18-hit barrage with five RBIs. Jacob Barber batted in three runs and Dombrowskas had two RBIs. Roberts, Andrus and Taylor Idol drove in one run apiece.

Ladies coming on strong

With a little under two weeks remaining in the regular season, it didn't seem possible that Winston-Salem State's softball team could come close to breaking even for the season.

When the Lady Rams lost a doubleheader to Barton on April 17, their record dropped to 11-19.

Since then, the ladies regrouped, went on a rampage and won nine of their last 10 games to finish up the regular season at 20-20. The late-season surge should give WSSU a huge boost in confidence entering the conference championships.

All-purpose utility player Chyna Riley deliv-

See WSSU on B2

Stellar track career ending for Parkland's Williams

Much has happened since that unexpected ending. Williams has fortified her reputation as one of the nation's elites. In the MileSplit USA rankings, she's No. 4 in the 100-meter hurdles (13.69 seconds). Entering the final days of the track season, Williams is No. 1 in the 100 hurdles and 300 hurdles (43.38 seconds) in the N.C. Runners state rankings.

Williams, a senior, is looking to close out a stellar career in grand style at the state outdoor championships on Saturday, May 9 in Greensboro. To do so, she must place among the top four in her events at the regional championships on Saturday, May 2, in order to qualify for state.

Assuming she makes the cut, her story line figures to be one of

the most intriguing for the state championships. Inquiring minds want to know if Williams can match her standout performance at the state indoor championships in February.

Williams owned the competition as Parkland's girls won the team title for the second year in a row. In the meantime, she won the 55-meter hurdles and 300-meter dash and ran the anchor leg on the Mustangs' gold-medal winning 4x200 and 4x400 relay teams. For that day's body of work, Williams was voted MVP of the state championships.

"That was a shock to me," said Williams, who will graduate with a 4.1 weighted grade-point average. "I never saw it coming. I broke the 55-meter hurdles record, which made me No. 1 all-

See Williams on B2



Photo by Craig T. Greenlee
Ebony Williams is No. 1 in the NC Runners state rankings in the 100-meter hurdles and 300-meter hurdles.

Lady Rams place 18th in women's 4x800m relay at The Penn Relays

WSSU closes out prestigious meet with strong effort

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

PHILADELPHIA - The Winston-Salem State Lady Rams track and field team closed out the 2015 edition of The Penn Relays in style when the WSSU 4x800m relay team placed 18th in the event on Saturday, April 25.

With the effort, the Lady Rams relay teams continued a stellar 2015 season.

The WSSU quartet of sophomore Raven Hamilton, sophomore Tametris Morrison, freshman Domtilla Kiplaget, and sophomore Micalyne Zimmerman ran a 9:10.32 in the event to place 18th against some of the top teams in the nation in both NCAA Division I and NCAA Division II.



Hamilton



Morrison



Zimmerman

Tennis comeback of Reynolds' Cooper went just as planned

BY CRAIG T. GREENLEE
FOR THE CHRONICLE

It was four years ago when Aaron Cooper inexplicably quit playing tennis. At the time, he was ranked among the state's Top 20 junior players in the 12-year-old age group.

Cooper purposely stayed away from the game through his first two years of high school. He filled the void by running cross-country and track.

This year, Cooper, of Reynolds High, made a surprise return to the sport he learned to play as a 5-year old in the Young Folks Tennis Association. By his 10th birthday, Cooper was playing frequently on the U.S. Tennis Association's junior circuit.

Although he hadn't played competitively for two-and-half years, Cooper, a junior with a 4.63 weighted grade-point average, made an impact as the No. 4 singles player at

Reynolds. He finished 12-0 in singles matches in the Central Piedmont Conference. Aside from that, he emerged as a key figure for the Demons, who won the conference tournament team title and advanced to the regional championships.

"I'm very pleased with Aaron's progress," said RJR Coach A.J. Highsmith. "It's easy to see that he's falling in love with the sport all over again. Even though he hadn't played for almost three years, he picked things up very quickly. We're super blessed. With Aaron on board, we became a better team instantly. Not only is there an excitement to his game, but he's very well rounded. He has the confidence and the skill to hit a variety of shots. That's not something you see all that often in high school players."

Cooper, who likes to put a lot of top-spin on his shots, has a strong backhand, but

See Cooper on B2



Photo by Craig T. Greenlee

Aaron Cooper of Reynolds finished the season 12-0 in singles matches in the Central Piedmont 4-A Conference.



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