

# SPORTS

## NCWC Teams Head to Georgia after Successful Seasons

### Deep Golf Team Breaks into Top 50

The Bishops golf team has cracked the top 50 in the national rankings after a strong spring season.

The team will travel to LaGrange, Georgia for the USA South Conference tournament, where it will face competition against a tough host school as well as talented Huntingdon and Methodist teams.

Now in his seventh season, Coach Gregg Ripke said the 2017 team is one of his strongest. The team is so deep, he said, that, barring injury, experienced seniors Matthew May and Pearce Parsons will not participate in the tourney.

As of early April, the Bishops were ranked 45th (of 280+ schools) in Division III golf. "I'm very proud of the boys for this accomplishment," Ripke said. "But more important than rank and scoring is the way this group has bonded with each other. We don't have any 'prima donnas' on our team. Everybody is considerate of each other and very respectful of the privilege they have to play golf here."

The team made an impressive showing at the Marine FCU Invite Tourney, placing 4th among 16 teams in the three-day competition at Camp LeJeune (March 31-April 2). Paced by Grady Anderson's 1-under 213, the Bishops finished 21 strokes behind Methodist, the first-place team and one of Wesleyan's top rivals.

Ripke was pleased with his team's performance. "Methodist is one of the leaders in a very strong conference, but we're 'breathing some of the same air,'" he said, noting that his players were paired with Monarch golfers in the final round. "My guys got to see that they're human as well. Methodist golfers can slice the ball off the tee as well as we can. Our guys hit it off the first tee better than four of their guys. Methodist came out on top at end of the day, and that's because of their scrambling abilities and their consistency over the duration of a match, areas we need to improve."

The USA South has long been among the country's most competitive conferences for golf. Methodist, perhaps the most dominant team over the years, is ranked seventh in the nation this year, placing it just third among conference foes behind Huntingdon at number one and LaGrange at five. Greensboro is ranked tenth.

Earlier in the season, Wesleyan racked up two first-place and two second-place finishes. Last September it hosted and won the Don Scalf Invitational and in March, it won the University of Mary Washington Eagle Invitational, topping the host school by 18 strokes. It took second in both the St. Andrews Fall Invitational and the Sand Hills Community College Invitational last month.

As his team prepares for the USA South tourney, Coach Ripke provided brief descriptions of the five players who will represent the college in LaGrange this week. "They're the same five that have played for us all semester long and I really didn't want to break up the group," the coach said.

--Grady Anderson: "He's been a scoring leader for us from his freshman year. Now a sophomore, he continues to lead in that category by a half stroke, 74.5. He's the shortest-hitting guy on the squad, but hits more fairways and gets more birdies on average than his teammates. His strength is consistency in scoring and his determination to score as low as possible. He never seems to give up; he's always upbeat."

--Mariano Silvestri: "A freshman from Argentina, he came in last semester and medaled (won) the Don Scalf we hosted at Northgreen last September. He's an awesome driver of the ball. I've seen a 340-yard drive from him and he does well with greens in regulation. He's a tremendous addition to the team this year because he pushes Grady and is just .2 strokes per round behind him for tournament play."

--David White: "From Kinston, he's a junior who's been our MVP for the last two years and continues to do well and push the other guys at the top. He played junior golf with Grady a few years ago. An absolute bulldog on the course, he gets in a zone and doesn't come out until after the 18th hole. He's consistent and you can always count on David to be in the mix for one of the four low scores in a five-player match. When he's not in that, it's a big surprise."

--John Luke Thornton: "He's another

freshman who's has been an asset to the team. He played golf with Grady in junior high at Parris Island when their dads were stationed there. He's not as consistent as he will become. But he's an absolute bomber of the golf ball, averaging 290 yards off the tee."

--Dustin Wood: "He's yet another freshman, who has come into his own just this semester. He didn't travel at all for fall-season tournaments. But he bought new clubs through our arrangement with Titleist, and got more comfortable with collegiate-level competition. A baseball player in high school, he came to golf later. He could play football with his size, but prefers golf and can bomb the tee shot about as far as Mariano. He led us in par-5 scoring at Camp Lejeune."

The Bishops have not played at LaGrange's home course, but plan a tune-up round there. In an effort to simulate tournament conditions, Ripke's team has practiced at Benvenue Country Club, with its small, fast greens. "Target golf will be our focus--hitting greens," he said.

### Balanced Baseball Team To Challenge LaGrange

Coach Charlie Long is confident about his team's prospects in the upcoming USA South Baseball Tourney, scheduled to begin April 12 in LaGrange, Georgia.

"Our league is evenly matched," Long said. "If we execute the small things, we have a great chance."

After finishing their 18-game conference schedule, his Bishops were in third place at 11-7 (22-14 overall). LaGrange dominated regular season action, compiling a 14-1 record as of April 5.

Long said two teams named Panthers, LaGrange and second-place Ferrum (11-4), should present the toughest competition for the Bishops. He looks forward to the potential matchups.

## Profile: Logan Lowery and Her Seven-Pitch Repertoire

By Quinn Tobias  
Decree Staff Writer

If the adage "Pitching wins championships" is true, then North Carolina Wesleyan's softball team is in great shape. The team had high expectations this year, coming off a successful run last season. Junior pitcher Logan Lowery has been a major contributor for the Bishops.

Lowery is from Kannapolis and went to South Rowan High School. She was introduced to softball by her family at the age of 10. "I really looked up to my cousin who played," Lowery said. "My whole family played softball."

Her senior year was crucial to her development in becoming a Bishop. "I started feeling confident," Lowery said. An assistant principal, a former Wesleyan coach, was a major factor in her decision to pitch in college. Her influence guided Lowery on her path to the pitching circle at Edge Field.

Lowery stepped in her freshman year playing a major role. "When I came, there were some really good players," she said. "I thought I'd have to wait my turn." Instead of waiting her turn, Lowery started in 16 games and appeared in 23. She experienced quick success finishing the year with a 2.67 ERA. Lowery's improvement is evident by the increase in her strikeout ratio, which is now almost two strikeouts more per seven innings than it was her freshman year.

Last year the softball team finished third in conference with a record of 20-15. Lowery appeared in 23 games finishing with a 13-5 record and a 2.94 earned run average. Coming into this season, her goals were to reduce her ERA and home runs given up. She also wanted to remain confident in the circle. "Pitching is mental," Lowery said. "I can't get down on myself."

To reach her lofty goals, Lowery worked hard during off-season, trying to perfect her craft. "In the off-season I focus on pitches," Lowery said. "I'm a movement pitcher so spin is a real big deal to me."

Lowery challenges batters with seven different pitches. The catcher has to use complex hand signals rather than the traditional "fingers-down"

"LaGrange has a tremendous balanced attack," Long said. "And Ferrum can run some good arms at you."

The Bishops did not face LaGrange in the regular season and will not play Ferrum until after the conference tournament, whose winner will advance to the NCAA Division III regional tourney.

Wesleyan's season featured a solid offense and strong pitching as well.

Ryan Grant (5-1, 1.81 ERA, 9.42 strikeouts per game) and T.J. Wilkie (2-2, 3.52 ERA) have anchored the pitching rotation. The two seniors, and sophomore Nathan Gardner (3-2, 2.76), would start the first three games in the tourney, which is in double-elimination format.

Long praised Grant's performance as his number-one starter. "Ryan's changeup has been great this season," he said. "He's very competitive and really attacks the hitters."

If the Bishops make an extended run in the four-day tourney, Long's staff will need to decide on additional starting pitchers. Long noted that, in a double-elimination format, it's important to win the first game. "If you drop the first one, then you need to win five or six games in a row," he said.

Like LaGrange, Wesleyan has thrived on the strength of a balanced offensive attack. As of April 5, four Bishops ranked in the USA-South's top 20 in RBIs—Tony Sanchez (30), Brad Pennington (27), Gardner (26), and Trey Croom (21). Sanchez tied for third in home runs with 5, while Cedrick Kornegay was hot down the stretch, collecting five hits and five RBIs in the team's season finale at Piedmont, a performance that boosted his average to a conference-leading .388.

"Balance is the key to offensive performance," Long explained. "When a few players have a bad game, we feel comfortable knowing that a few more will have outstanding games to pick up the needed runs."



Pitcher Logan Lowery SI Photo

signaling because of the number of pitches Lowery throws. Her most effective pitches are the drop curve and change up. "I rarely throw my fastball," Lowery said. "I feel more confident with my movement." With an arsenal of off-speed pitches Lowery has kept opposing hitters off balance posting a career 2.70 ERA.

Like opposing batters, Lowery's teammates struggle when facing her during practice. Lindsey Sharpe, a senior outfielder and pitcher, attests to Lowery's pitching. "She's hard to hit," Sharpe said. "She has a lot of movement and off-speed pitches. She mixes them up well and keeps the batters off balance."

Ashlyn Gosnell, a freshman pitcher, admires Lowery's breaking pitches. "She has a lot of movement and a very good drop curve," Gosnell said. Sarah Bowyer, a junior catcher, makes up the second half of the battery. "I like catching Logan because she is more of a movement pitcher," Bowyer said. "Her best pitch is a drop curve."

Lowery has a commanding presence when on the field, according to her teammates. "She's a leader. She's vocal," Sharpe said. "The team is pretty confident when she's pitching." Bowyer agreed. "When Logan's in the circle, we know we're going to have a good game," she said.

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### Coach Departs, Tennis Teams in Hunt for Titles

With a new coach at the helm, the Bishops men's tennis team will try to capture its ninth consecutive USA South championship and advance to the NCAA regionals.

As of April 8, the Bishops were 9-0 in conference action, with a stranglehold on first place. The team has won by shutout, 9-0, in eight matches and won the ninth, 7-2, over Averett.

At one point Wesleyan went on an 11-match win streak, with a key victory, 5-4, over former rival Christopher Newport, then-ranked 28th in the nation. After losing all three doubles matches to the Captains, the Bishops stormed back to win five of six in singles, with junior Sebastian Sikh crushing his opponent, David Reed, 6-4, 6-1. Other wins came from Ioannis Brokakis (7-6, 6-2), J.D. Telles (6-3, 6-4), and David Appelqvist (6-1, 6-3). In a gutsy performance, David Chang took number-six singles, overcoming an early deficit to claim victory, 6-7, 6-3, 7-5.

The winning streak ended when the Bishops fell, 6-3, to Barton, a DII school in Wilson.

"Barton is a great team with a great coach," said then-coach Dustin Hale. "The match was played in tough conditions and we lost a couple tight three-set matches as well as a hard-fought doubles match. Those matches proved to be the difference."

Hale said the team made changes to its doubles teams after the Barton loss and the adjustments paid instant dividends. The Bishops posted a 9-0 shutout of Methodist, perhaps the team's "biggest conference threat," and then turned in an impressive match the next day, as it vanquished Pacific College (Oregon), the 32nd-ranked team, 6-3. "Beating Pacific showed us that our win against CNU was no fluke," Hale said. "We've been working hard all year and the guys are starting to believe they can do great things together. We played the best doubles we've played all year."

Hale praised Mark Sokolov and Richard Gende, who won at five and six singles. Sikh led the way against Pacific, teaming with Brokakis for a win at number-one doubles and then dominating at number-one singles, 6-2, 6-3. "Sebastian went out there and proved he is one of the top players in the country," Hale said.

On the women's side, consistency has allowed the Bishops to build a 5-1 conference record. In its most recent match, April 8 at Greensboro, the Bishops demolished The Pride by winning 75 of 76 games (two other matches were won by forfeit).

Number-one Flor Sorrentino has been solid all year, taking on the opponent's top players. She is 4-1 in singles, and 2-1 in teaming with Stephany Barbera in the top doubles pairing. Leigh Hales (5-0) and Nicole Halabi (5-0) have been perfect so far in their conference singles matches, while Andrea Tobar is 5-1.

The team's only conference loss was at the hands of perennial power Methodist, 7-2.

Both the men's and women's teams will be led on an interim basis by Albie Brice, in his first season as assistant coach. Hale, a second-year coach, left the

team in early April, just weeks before the USA South tournament and an expected berth in the NCAA regionals.

Asked to comment on Hale's abrupt departure, Sports Information Director Rikki Rich said, in an email, "Coach Hale resigned to pursue other opportunities."

### Softball Team Gets Eliminated by Ferrum

The Wesleyan softball team, predicted to finish first in a tough USA South Conference, saw its season come to an end in a preliminary round of the playoffs in Virginia.

The host school, the 3rd-seeded Ferrum Panthers, shut down the 4th-seeded Bishops' offense and swept a Saturday afternoon doubleheader, winning 6-0 and 5-1 on April 8.

Coach John Brackett conceded that his team may have been a little nervous—"That's normal, considering the stakes"—but did not feel Ferrum's home-field advantage was much of a factor. "We had already beaten their ace there earlier this year," he explained. "We were confident."

Defensive lapses led to five unearned runs in the first game, with the Panthers scoring three in the first inning after an error by right-fielder Hannah Ivester. The Bishops committed three other errors on the day, and starting pitcher Shelby Godwin issued four walks.

"We could have been sharper defensively, but our lack of hitting was the difference in the first game," said Brackett, as his team was limited to six hits and one walk by Panther pitcher Courtney Rudd. Ivester led the Bishops offense with two singles and a double.

Facing a must-win game in the best-of-three series, the Bishops were unable to unleash their offense in game two. Panther pitcher Ashton Lambeth was dominant, yielding five hits and no walks on the day. Catcher Sarah Bowyer drove in Wesleyan's only run.

"We just didn't swing the bats well in game two," Brackett said. "But you have to give their number-two pitcher credit. We're a good hitting team, but that was the second time she beat us this year. She did a good job of keeping us off balance with her off-speed pitches, and she kept the ball down in the zone."

Though disappointed their season ended at Ferrum, the team took satisfaction in its play down the stretch. Before Saturday's playoff, the Bishops had won 10 of their last 14 conference matchups, while getting strong pitching from Godwin and Logan Lowery and a solid offense.

"The USA South is a very balanced and competitive conference," Coach Brackett said. "Our team had a good season. In fact, we were able to beat every team in our division at least once and even swept a couple of teams along the way, including the second-place team. We played all three phases of the game well at times this year. I just wish we could have been a little more consistent doing that."

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Both Judd and Tankelewicz, his teammate on the Bishops hoops team, like Rhode Island. "Rhode Island will be the Cinderella team this year," Judd said. Added Tankelewicz: "Rhode Island is a well-rounded, tough team"

Many students become so engrossed in the action that they watch games during their classes, either on phones or laptops. In an informal survey, all 10 students interviewed indicated they would sneak a look during class lectures and lessons.

"I have to check each game because I want to see how long my bracket will stay perfect," said Williams.

Robin Pietryk, a professor in sports administration, has noticed the uptick in distracted students, in particular during the early rounds when many games take place in the afternoon.

"The students are on their phones more during March Madness," said Pietryk, who picked Gonzaga to win it all.

For students in North Carolina, and

other die-hard basketball fans around the country, March Madness is equivalent to the Super Bowl, considered by many the greatest sporting event in the world (with all due respect to soccer fans).

"March Madness is arguably the best style of playoffs in sports," Judd said. "It's best because any team can win each game and it's single elimination."

Tankelewicz agreed with Judd. "The Super Bowl and March Madness are 1a and 1b because the Super Bowl is just one night and everyone stops what they're doing to watch it," he said. "But March Madness holds an advantage over the Super Bowl because more teams make the playoffs."

This year saw UNC-Chapel Hill take the title over Gonzaga, which was ranked number one for much of the year, since it lost only one game. The Cinderella team was the University of South Carolina, a seventh-seed, which made it to the Final Four. And by the end of the tourney, according to NCAA.com, no perfect brackets were reported.