

Women's softball team sets school record for wins

Russ Smith
The Pendulum

Believing you can win is only half the battle in sports competition. Proving you can win makes a lot of believers.

The Elon women's 18th ranked softball team has made a lot of believers this season. The Lady Christians have mowed-down their opponents to the tune of a 27-6 record, capturing the SAC-8 conference title at an 11-1 clip.

"Last year, the girls were disappointed coming in third in the SAC," said coach Susan Leonard of last year's fate. "I knew when they were disappointed with that, they were going to be good this year. It's something you could feel deep down inside."

So far in '92, Leonard has had the hitting and pitching last season's 15-13 team missed.

"The big difference this year has been our batting," Leonard said. "We've had a lot of people this year who hit the ball real well."

The Lady Christians are hitting a whopping .332 with a .475 slugging percentage compared to a somewhat dismal .284 average at the plate last year.

Contributing to those eye-catching statistics are Elon's "Diamond Gems": Velma Degree, Angie Padon, Laura Case, and Tricia Wissinger. Together, the five have combined for a batting average of .405, 161 hits - 6 home runs, and 109 RBIs.

"Velma is a real strong girl - she can hit the ball as hard as anybody," Leonard said. "She's our designated hitter. She concentrates on one thing, DH-ing, and does it really well."

"Laura (Case) is probably the best 2nd baseman anyone will see in the conference," Leonard added. "She's a good athlete, has a real strong arm, and can solidly hit the ball."

The Christians' 2nd-sacker has hit two home runs this year - a couple of 280 foot shots over the fence.

"It's been a great season for all of us," Case said of the Christians dream season. "We're hitting in every inning and scoring runs early. Last year, we'd score one or two runs here and there."

The other two "Gems" have shined also, Padon picking up from where she left off last year, clubbing a .424 average with 65 RBIs. Freshman sensation, Tricia Wissinger leads the team in round-trippers with three.

The Christians are also solid on the mound.

The pitching staff consists of two superstars, in their own right, Donna Leigh (14-3), and freshman hurler Susan French (13-3). The two have a combined ERA of under 2.50.

"Donna (Leigh) was under a lot of stress having to pitch every game last year," said Leonard of '91s pitching woes. "I saw Susan two years ago (in high school) and knew she was going to be good."

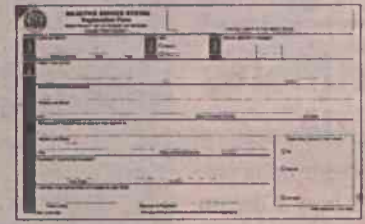
"Susan's having a great season. She and Donna complement each other. Donna's a power pitcher and Susan tends to move the ball around the plate more."

French says she makes the other team play her game.

"I guess I'm lucky," she said. "I move the ball around a lot and they pop it up or hit ground balls. I rely on my team to back me up - they're incredible."

Leonard points out that while winning a national championship will be tough to accomplish for her first-ever collegiately ranked team, she says believing will keep her team alive.

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