

Softball Update

By Tanner Peterson

Head Coach Bob Bartel and the Golden Bear softball team recently kicked their season off with a bang. The Golden Bears played their first game vs. Concordia Portland. The Golden Bears needed some late inning drama to finish off the Cavaliers as freshman shortstop, Justine Schattner blasted a two run homerun in the top of the 7th inning. The women went on to rate on the win, 8-7. The Golden Bears went on to lose their next four games of the trip before returning from Las Vegas to the frigid temperatures of Minnesota.

The team only lost one senior from the 2015 roster, a team that finished last season with a record of 16-37. This year should be full of familiar faces with plenty of experience, and will also include some new faces drizzled in the lineup. The team is returning 14 players, including sophomore infielder, Nicole Thompson, and senior outfielder, Jamie Fleischhacker. Those two alone combined to lead the team in batting average, slugging percentage, runs, hits, runs batted in, and stolen bases. It might be safe to say that they will be counted on this season to help the program succeed. Although the only senior that



Photo By Maria Cruz

the Golden bears lost was arguably their top pitcher, Haley Schanks and Linzy Heim are both returning players with pitching experience.

Coach Bartel emphasized the strength of this team is its hitting ability. "I think our one through nine will be pretty solid." "It's become a hitter's game, so we're going to have to hit the ball more than we have in the past years where we have relied on pitching and defense. Hitters are so good now days and the strike zone seems to be shrinking that it's becoming a hitters game, so we're going to have to adjust and outscore people."

Before the season started, the coaching staff asked each player to come up with an individual and a team goal for the upcoming season. The majority of the team goals were to make the conference tournament. The Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference only allows the top 10 out of 16 teams to qualify for the conference tournament. With the combination of talented youth and many experienced players, this could be the year the Golden Bears turn the corner in route to their 2nd NSIC Championship in program history.

Baseball Update

By Cole Schuessler

The seniors on Concordia St. Paul's baseball team have had experience exceeding expectations. And as the green grass starts to show and the sounds of the ball hitting the bat ring through the air, they look to do so again. The last three years, the Golden Bears have finished 6th, 5th and 4th respectively in the 15-team NSIC, all after being picked to finish 7th or 8th in the preseason coaches poll each of those years. This year, the Bears were again picked to finish seventh. With ten seniors on the team, many of them being significant contributors on last year's squad the Golden Bears look to surpass expectations once again.

The seniors will be sure to make their mark on their final season, but with Concordia's biggest baseball roster ever, including 16 freshman, there will be others looking to contribute. Coach Mark "Lunch" McKenzie stated, "We expect to have a well-balanced team as far as some veteran leadership and some freshman getting an opportunity to show us what they can do early in their careers." As the freshman and transfers have come in, Coach McKenzie noted some changes to the team and well as some constants. "This year once again we feel real strong about our pitching and defense. We have better pitching depth than we've ever had here." He went on to talk about the changes saying, "We feel with some of the young kids, we can have more of a potent lineup, and a little more team speed than we've had the last couple of years."

While Concordia returns much of it's production from last year, both on the mound and in the lineup, there will be opportunities for some of the younger players to get on the field. "There could be an opportunity at first base, and there could be a couple opportunities in the outfield for the freshman", McKenzie said. This year's freshman recruiting class is the largest in team history, and McKenzie looks for them to provide both talent and depth. Six of the incoming players competed in Minnesota's high school all-star game, according to McKenzie.

The Golden Bears started the season off with a five game

trip to Arizona, with doubleheaders against Malone (Ohio) and Southwest Minnesota State and a game against Missouri Valley College. They will now travel to Augustana (March 13-14) and Upper Iowa (March 19-20) to round out the nonconference season. The NSIC conference season then starts on March 25th against Bemidji State and closes May 7th at Winona State. With a compact 50 game schedule, the Bears will need their senior leadership, new depth, and talent to continue their string of successful seasons.

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