

BIG WEST
 CONFERENCE

CHAMPIONS


BY AMELIA HOOPER

All for One and Won for All

Dedication and hard work by Pacific women's softball players and coaches paid off when they seized their first Big West Championship in program history, marking the best season in the 34-year history of Pacific softball.

When Pacific's softball team won the 2011 Big West Conference championship, they capped a turnaround that took the collegiate softball world by surprise.

"What we did this year wasn't expected by anybody — except maybe ourselves," says Head Coach Brian Kolze. Originally picked by Big West coaches to finish fifth in 2011, the Tigers burned through their scheduled series with a fire lit by determination, their 37–19 overall record a testament to the hard work of coaches and players alike. Shortstop Nicole Matson '12 attributes the success in part to a more tight-knit team, which hasn't always been the case.

"Last year it was different," Matson says. "The older girls kind of took the younger girls under their wings." The senior players teach their underclassmen about accountability, and about

bringing their best to every game and leaving disputes off the field, she explains. In turn, the younger players have become ready to mentor new freshmen for the upcoming season.

"We were individually talented, but we were also talented as a unit, and we knew how to use our talents to work together," Matson says. Catcher Amy Moore '13 agrees, saying that for the first time in her softball career, she trusts every member of the team to give their all.

The closeness also extends beyond the field. Many of the girls share housing and spend leisure time together. Outfielder Lindsey Pierce '11 says events like the new team retreat also helped the players bond. Their camaraderie and enthusiasm are evident as they reflect on the season, laughing, joking and talking over one another.

Matson says the team organizes extra practice sessions for themselves, and the players invest a lot of themselves in improving their



Nicole Matson '12

stats and skills. During the spring break, when most students were enjoying time off, the Pacific softball team was on campus practicing. Taking their mentoring skills off campus, they also took time to do community service, volunteering with special education students at the Walton Special Center, and reading to children at Don Riggio School.

The coaches are there to make sure the students stay on track, balancing their hard work with time for physical and mental recovery. Balance is extremely important for scholar-athletes who also care about academic success. The team GPA was greater than a 3.0 for 2010–11 and improved between fall and spring, a rare accomplishment. There isn't much time for watching TV or goofing off. When not in class, they are practicing, studying or on the road. Schoolwork goes on the road, too, to be done in hotels, on the bus or while waiting in airports.

"It's not always easy. What they do takes a lot of sacrifice," says Coach Kolze, whom team members lovingly refer to as "Boss." He and the other coaches have worked hard to revitalize Pacific softball, and he speaks proudly of the team and their drive to succeed. All the effort of coaches and players started to pay off when the team went up against Long Beach last April.

"It really set the whole season in motion," says pitcher Nikki Armagost '13. The Tigers took that winning streak and ran with it through the rest of April and May.

The series against Cal State Fullerton and Cal Poly stood out as particularly proud moments. In back-to-back games of a doubleheader, they beat Fullerton in five innings, a feat that has never happened before in school history.

"Boss had a tear in his eye," Moore laughs, referring to the Cal Poly series that clinched the championship. "Everyone contributed in that series."

"They're making themselves better for their future lives," Kolze says of the strong work ethic and self-discipline the team members have developed through playing softball.

Pierce, who plans to work in special education, speaks of the team's setting and working toward goals, and how she envisions using that in the classroom. Matson, who hopes to become a coach herself, got some practice at it working with less-experienced teammates when an injury benched her for a season in 2010. Though impatient to get back in the game, she says her time observing and helping younger players improve their game was valuable for her future in physical education. Armagost has her sights on the World Series.

But for now, they have plans for the next season. Having earned the respect of the league as a force to be reckoned with, these Tigers are particularly hungry for another winning season.

"We want to keep going; we want to keep climbing," says Moore fervently. The competition will be expecting more of them in the coming season, but they aren't daunted.

"I like that we have a target on our back," says Matson. "It makes everyone work harder."

The energy and drive are palpable among the players for the coming season and beyond. With only two players graduating, there is still a strong core, and they're ready to go in fighting. Their passion for the team and the game fuels their sacrifices and hard work.

"It's the game we chose to love," says Pierce.

Championship Season Highlights

37–19 Overall Record

13th in the nation for hitting (.323 team average)

Set the all-time new record in Big West history (was .311)

Set a new Pacific record (was .299)

All-Big West Awards

Coach of the Year Brian Kolze, head coach

Player of the Year Nikki Armagost '13

Freshman Player of the Year Kelsey Rodriguez '14

All-Big West First Team

Set a conference record with seven

First Team All-Conference awards:

Nikki Armagost '13 Pitcher and Utility

Amy Moore '13 Catcher

Nicole Matson '12. First Base

Lindsey Pierce '11 Outfield

Megan Hom '13. Outfield

Kelsey Rodriguez '14 Designated Player

Scholar-Athlete Honors

National Fastpitch Coaches Association

All-America Scholar Athletes

(3.5 GPA or higher during academic year)

Megan Allen '13

Nikki Armagost '13

Gabby McDaniel '13

Big West All-Academic Team Honors

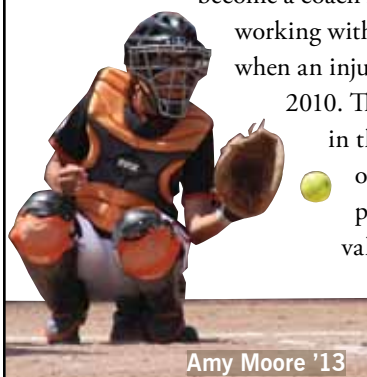
(minimum 3.2 cumulative GPA)

Megan Allen '13

Shaina Brock '11

Megan Hom '13

Gabby McDaniel '13



Amy Moore '13



Lindsey Pierce '11