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(S.D.)- BHSU Opens Softball Season In Vegas



By: Jeremy Anderson Posted at: 02/07/2014 11:07 AM

(Las Vegas, NV)- The 2014 Black Hills State University softball team begins their year this weekend in Las Vegas to compete in the annual Desert Stinger Tournament, hosted by Montana State University Billings.

The Yellow Jackets will play five games over the course of the weekend beginning at 3 p.m. MT today, Friday, Feb. 7, versus Western Washington University. At 8 p.m. MT tonight, the Jackets will play Augustana College to complete the day's double-header.

Saturday's double-header begins at 5:30 p.m. MT as they take on Notre Dame de Namur (CA), followed by a match-up versus MSU-Billings at 8 p.m. MT. The final game will come on Sunday, Feb. 9, versus Western Oregon University with the first pitch schedule for 3 p.m. MT.

The tournament will take place at Majestic Park, which is located northwest of Las Vegas and includes 12 lighted fields with electronic scoreboards.

Head coach, Amy Gurney, spoke to her added personnel to help establish the team within division II and the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference.

"We are still working on building a core that will grow as we grow as a division II team. We have the personnel, but they are young, so it's about learning how to play with each other and working through the ups and downs of the game and the season together," Gurney said.

In 2013, Gurney and the squad, which returns 10 veteran players, finished with an overall record of 5-31 and went 4-24 in their first full-season in the RMAC on the division II level. Fortunately, the Jackets bring back the leading hitter from last season, Erica Everson, who finished the year with a .394 batting average.

Everson had 41 hits a season ago, including one homerun, 16 RBIs and six doubles. Veteran outfielder, Brooke Grant, and middle infielder, Ryan Cook, also return to provide additional offensive support after Grant batted .277 and Cook finished with an average of .276 with 3-homeruns and 17 RBIs in 2013.

Gurney stated that she will be looking on the offensive end to provide more runs than last year after averaging 3.25 runs per game.

"I'm expecting our offense to be explosive. We have put in quality hours working on our contact and technique, but we have also dived into the mind side of things, and I'm hoping it gives us a leg up as we start live this week," Gurney said.

The Jackets also brought in five new players to provide even more depth offensively and defensively with catcher Kayla Hallock (Fr., Cedar City, Utah), third-baseman Alexis Shaffer (Jr., Highlands Ranch, Colo.), and former Yellow Jacket basketball player turned outfielder, Katherine Drake (Jr., Castle Rock, Wyo.).

Two new pitchers, Stefanie Witman (Fr., Mt. Vernon, Wash.) and Savannah Eckhardt (Fr., Cedar City, Utah) come

onboard as well to jump into the rotation alongside returning pitchers from last season in sophomore Kaitlin Farrar (14 G, 3-7, 7.47 ERA) and Brittney Geersen who redshirted last season.

"Defensively, I'm looking forward to our pitching staff being a true pitching staff," Gurney continued. "We have four kids who complement each other and they must know that not one of them can do it all – it's going to take a staff to get us to our goals."

Overall, there will be 28 teams participating in the tournament including nine teams from the RMAC including: Adams State, Chadron State, UCCS, Colorado Mines, CSU-Pueblo, Fort Lewis, N.M Highlands, Regis, and Western N.M.