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(Neb.)- WNCC Softball Team opens Up On Friday In Texas Tourney  [Listen](#)



By: Jeremy Anderson Posted at: 02/12/2014 02:05 PM

(Scottsbluff, NE)- The Western Nebraska Community College softball team will be open the season this weekend with nine games in four days, including facing two, top 10 ranked teams.

More importantly, the games this weekend is crucial for experience as the Cougars have a young squad with just three returning players from last year's 55-10 team.

"We are very athletic and have versatility," WNCC coach Maria Winn-Ratliff said. "One concern I have is that we only have 3 returning players."

The Cougars open play Friday and Saturday in the Midland (Texas) Invite, where they will face Western Texas, No. 5 Howard College, and Midland College on Friday, and then Clarendon and Luna colleges on Saturday. After that, they will take on No. 10 Odessa and Coastal Bend College in Odessa, Texas, on Sunday, before making a stopover on Monday in Lamar, Colo., to face Colby Community College.

"The seven teams that we will face while in Texas will be very challenging," Winn-Ratliff said. "One reason is that they are all from Texas and haven't been affected with this winter weather and have had opportunities to already play games."

The Cougars biggest strength could be a deep pitching staff with four strong arms tossing fastballs. The question remains, however, how does the team replace last year's No. 1 pitcher Bianca Duran, who is now at Division I Louisiana Tech University as the Techsters' No. 1 pitcher.

Winn-Ratliff said that they should be OK at the pitching position.

"We have 4 talented young ladies than can all provide us with different looks in the circle," she said.

The Cougars return two pitchers from last season in Shelby McGraw and RaVae Herrera, both of Pueblo, Colo. Last season, Herrera went 13-3 with 3.24 ERA, including 66 strikeouts, while McGraw was 5-4 with a 3.18 ERA and 40 strikeouts.

WNCC also welcomes two freshman throwers in Madison Davis of West Jordan, Utah, and Jordan Smith of Wellsville, Utah. All four are expected to see time in the circle.

Offensively, this year's team might be a little different with the graduation of Duran and Kasey Cash,

who are one-two in the season home run category. The two hitters hit a combined 45 home runs a year ago.

“We have a lot more team speed than we have in the past,” she said. “We did lose some power from last year but I think once we get in the swing of things, we will be fine from an offensive side.”

What makes this team different than previous team is the depth, where players can play a multitude of positions.

“The entire team show glimpses of promise,” Winn-Ratliff said. “We will rely on all 15 of them to contribute to our programs success.”

The three returners from a year ago include Herrera, McGraw, and starting middle-infielder Angel Council. The rest of the lineup is comprised of 12 freshmen.

Besides Smith and Davis, the rest of the team includes Courtney Cloud and Emily Rust of Maple Valley, Wash.; Lindsay Guymon of Stansbury, Utah; Alys Linford of Bluffdale, Utah; Jessica Ball and Kelsey Bernhardt of Denver, Colo.; Morgan Varoz of Riverton, Utah; Hannah Gonzales of Pueblo, Colo.; Echo Lee of Salt Lake City, Utah; and Macy Child of Longmont, Colo.

Winn-Ratliff said for this team to successful they have to do the little things.

“We will need great team chemistry, good pitching, and timely hitting,” she said.

After this weekend’s slate of games, the Cougars will compete in a tournament at Frank Phillips College before traveling to Otero Junior College for a conference game.

The Cougars’ first home games will be March 8-10 when they host Williston State College and Dawson Community College.