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2-24-2022

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Recommended Citation

Goldman, Tara King, "Redhawks Softball Team: A Successful Evolution" (2022). *The Spectator Online*. 542.
<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online/542>

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Redhawks Softball Team: A Successful Evolution

Tara King Goldman, Author

The Seattle University Softball team starts the season at the top, but keeping that position will be challenging. The Redhawks are the returning champions, having won every Western Athletic Conference (WAC) championship since 2019. In the 2022 WAC Preseason Coaches Poll, Seattle U ranked first out of six teams in the West Division. They had three players selected to the Preseason All-WAC team: Graduate Student pitcher Carley Nance, Senior center fielder Olivia Viggiano and Junior pitcher Stefanie Madrigal. Madrigal was also just named WAC Pitcher of the Week Feb. 14.

The Redhawks began their 2022 season on the road. They swept their first road trip, coming home with wins against Western Michigan, Murray State, Bowling Green, Ball State and St. Thomas in Rosemount, Illinois.

With six of their nine starters from last year having graduated and ten new players, there are novel dynamics on the field. The new players on the roster are an outward sign of evolution, which seems to be a part of success for returning players, including players in their sixth year like Nance.

“It is hard to have success if you don’t evolve. We have to adjust our pitching, hitting and playing styles to be able to have success against everybody we play,” Nance said.

Madrigal added that it is only in retrospect that she has seen her growth as a player.

“Looking back, I can see how much better I have gotten, and it is all thanks to our pitching coaches,” Madrigal said.

In addition to the support offered by the softball team’s pitching coaches, much of the team’s improvement may come from head Coach Geoff Hirai’s belief that everyone is a leader. The Redhawks have no team captain, which allows everyone to be a leader at any point in time.

Five additional teams will be added to the new Southern Division of the WAC, yet Seattle U will not have a chance to face them until the WAC Tournament. Hirai is maintaining a focus on the most pressing challenges rather than the end of the season.

“We will deal with that when we get to the tournament, right now our focus is on next week,” Hirai said.

Hirai also emphasized how work ethic creates a strong culture of success for his team.

“Wins come and go. Working hard and fighting for every inning is what leads to being successful at the end of the year,” Hirai said.



Jordie Simpson

Seattle University softball team practicing on Logan field.

Madrigal explained that there is a culture of friendship that extends off the field.

"We really are a family-oriented team. We just always have each other's back and cheer each other on," Madrigal said.

The Seattle U Softball team rallies around keeping their games fun, but they do not shy away from pressure situations.

"We have a great time together and it really translates on the field. I think pressure situations are exciting. It's kind of what you practice towards, preparing for, so when you get to it, you are ready for it," Nance said.

On their second road trip of the year, Feb. 18-20, Seattle U faced several Pac-12 teams at the Stanford Invitational Tournament, in Stanford, Calif.

The Redhawks suffered their first loss to Stanford 0-7, Feb. 18. They then lost their first game of a doubleheader against BYU 2-5, Feb. 19. Nance tallied her 350th career strikeout against BYU, tying the Redhawks record held by Erin Martin and Shi Smith.

In their second game of the day, Madrigal had a bounce back game against San Jose State, pitching her third complete-game, giving up eight hits and one run. Nance doubled in the fourth inning, and freshman outfielder Mckenna Crum came in to pinch run. Freshman infielder Katie Walling got her first career hit and RBI after batting in Crum. The second run for the Redhawks came in the fifth inning with junior infielder Lily Garcia reaching first on a fielding error and scoring via a single by Viggiano. Madrigal gave up San Jose State's lone run in the top of the seventh inning.

They finished up the tournament with another doubleheader, Feb. 20. In the first game against University Illinois-Chicago (UIC), they were tied 1-1 in the eighth inning. Viggiano reached first on a fielder's choice, then junior infielder Madison Kahwaty reached first on a fielding error and Viggiano scored. Nance followed up with a single, scoring Kahwaty to win 3-1.

In their final game, the Redhawks took on Stanford again. They came out fighting, but did not score. Nance kept the Cardinals offense at bay until the fifth inning and the Redhawks wound up losing 0-5.

The Redhawks head to Cathedral City, Calif., for more non-conference tournament play that can be watched on Flosoftball, Feb. 25-27. The Redhawks will continue to travel until their first home game against Robert Morris at Logan Field 5 p.m., March 9.