



## **Grand Canyon University Softball 2009**

**I**f ever there was a time Grand Canyon wanted to make its mark on the diamond, it's this year.

Confidence brims throughout the locker room, in the softball office and on the field in Antelope country. With some heavy hitting back and a polished defense upgraded by new additions, GCU is hoping to make the 2009 season one of the best in school history. To do that, the Antelopes will need to win at least 28 games. That is the benchmark the Lopes set in the program's first year in 2004. Not since then have they equaled that win total, but this year's team has the makings to do that and more.

### **Pitchers**

The Antelopes have more depth in the circle this season, with four hurlers in the rotation available. Sophomore Elise Hull returns with the team's only experience at the NCAA Division II level. Hull worked sparingly last year and is coming off a season-ending injury, but may see more time on the mound this year. Three junior college transfers could have an immediate impact in the damage control department. Jessica Palma, a transfer from Brown Mackie College, has velocity, control and a deep assortment of pitches in her bag of tricks. Natasha Dypchey, a two-time all-region selection at Western Nebraska Community College, has a lot of movement on her ball, in addition to being able to mix her pitches. Samantha Tiefenthaler is an Honorable Mention NJCAA All-American at Iowa Western Community College, following a 27-9 season in which she struck out 157 batters in 230 1/3 innings. Tiefenthaler pitched Iowa Western to a fifth place finish at the junior college national championships. "Our new kids add maturity," GCU coach Ann Pierson said.

### **Catchers**

Junior Erin Ladd returns from a season-ending hand injury after starting the first 19 games in 2008. She had a .986 fielding percentage, committing only one error in 70 chances last year. She had 65 putouts and threw out three runners attempting to steal last season. Her leadership behind the plate is one of the biggest assets in the pitching game, and her savvy nature in on-field defensive strategies is a boon to the Antelopes. Erika Reay, a newcomer from Central Arizona College, was a two-time all-conference selection in junior college. She, like Ladd, offers pop in her bat, and has a strong arm and good skills behind the plate. Both catchers possess the capabilities to steady the pitching staff.

## **Infielders**

Grand Canyon's right side infielders have a ton of experience and provide explosion at the plate. First baseman Randi Johns holds the majority of the school's offensive career and season records, while second baseman Yasmeen Watkins lit up West Region pitchers for a .400-plus average and big-time power numbers in 2008. Johns led the Antelopes with 244 putouts last season, and was a part of a team-high seven double plays in earning Second Team All-PacWest honors. She had a .973 fielding percentage, which ranked third on the team among the team's regulars. Watkins, who was converted from a junior college outfielder in her first season with the Lopes last year, had a .922 fielding percentage and turned three double plays in becoming the PacWest Newcomer of the Year. Junior college transfer Kelli Bridges, a junior shortstop from Coeur d' Alene, Idaho, was a Second Team all-region selection at North Idaho College last year. Her North Idaho team finished second in the nation in 2007 when she had 68 hits, scored 46 runs, stole 14 bases and drove in 46 runs. She offers a great deal of power and speed to GCU's lineup. Sophomore third baseman Brittney Wojtowicz was part of Phoenix College's junior college national championship team in 2008. She hit .417 last season, and could be a big stick in the middle of the lineup. Junior second baseman Gayle Nisbet, a transfer from Mesa Community College, is expected to see time in the field and in the batter's box. She will also be used as a runner. "She has a strong work ethic and game sense which strengthens her skills as a middle infielder," Pierson said. Priscilla Ortez, a junior transfer from Brown Mackie College, can play at both corners of the infield. She provides power to the lineup.

## **Outfielders**

Senior Tana Holtorf is the veteran leader roaming the grass. Last year she was converted from right field to center field midway through the season, and excelled with her range and speed in tracking down balls. Holtorf was a Second Team PacWest choice in 2008, and committed only three errors in 86 chances. As a hitter, she led the team in doubles and posted a team-tying 10-game hitting streak as a junior. "She provides leadership and knowledge to act as our captain in the outfield," Pierson said. "She'll be a mainstay in the meaty part of the lineup." Her younger sister, Kara Holtorf, a freshman who won two state titles in high school, adds a lot of speed to both sides of the game. Her ability to steal bases, in addition to her three-tool traits as a bunter, slapper and hitter accentuate Grand Canyon's offense with a great deal of flexibility. Junior Tracy Lubken, a junior who was part of Phoenix College's 2008 National Championship team, possesses a strong arm and good speed in tracing the warning track. Her skills as a slapper and hit-away offensive threat should keep her in the lineup on a routine basis. Junior Nicole Lorenzi transferred from Gateway Community College. She blends leadership skills, a strong arm and excellent speed in with an ability to bunt, slap and hit away to provide even more dynamics to a potentially dangerous outfield.

## **Overall**

With nine junior college transfers, the Antelopes carry a new image this year, but the makeup of the team is full of veteran statesmanship that offers promise and potential. "We have a lot of new bodies, but tremendous experience," Pierson said. The Lopes' pitching depth may be the biggest upgrade, but opponents can't overlook Grand Canyon's power at the plate and propensity to run the bases. "We will need to stay healthy," Pierson said, "to keep our players pushing each other to compete and win."