

2008 BAYLOR SOFTBALL PREVIEW: 'AGAIN!'

AFTER THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SEASON IN PROGRAM HISTORY, THE LADY BEARS ARE NOT GOING TO ACCEPT ANYTHING LESS THAN A REPEAT OF 2007.

Conference championship, regional title, super regional champion and an appearance in the Women's College World Series. Sounds great, right? The question is, what do you do for an encore? If you are the 2008 Baylor softball team, you do it again. That is the theme for this year's squad, and head coach Glenn Moore believes that this team can do it.

"We want to win a Big 12 championship, get to the World Series and go a step further," Moore said. "Nobody will ever take the 2007 Big 12 championship away from us, so we don't have to defend that one. We have a chance to go get another one in 2008, so let's do it again."

To some, Baylor's rise to national prominence may have seemed to culminate in 2007, but to Moore and the Lady Bears, it was just the next step. Baylor has spent 55 straight weeks in the top-25 heading into the 2008 season, and has been to four straight NCAA Tournaments. After wrapping up 2007 with a 51-16 record overall and a national ranking of fifth, Moore and his staff know expectations for this program are high.

"Our desire was not to build a foundation that would be a one-hit wonder," Moore said. "It would be a program that would sustain. There is an expectation with this program to be in the top-20 and these players think we should win."

Baylor has enjoyed a lot of success in years past, but nothing like 2007. However, this team is not worried about handling that success, in fact, it is ready to embrace it, move forward and improve.

"We have had quite a bit of success here, although last year was our most successful season," Moore said. "This

team does not think last year was an accident. If anything, they think we should have gone a lot further, and that is the approach you would like them to have. It is evident in the way they work. To be able to finish fifth in the nation, win a Big 12 title and get to the World Series and still have a bitter taste in your mouth says something for the program."

This season's Lady Bears knows they will have big shoes to fill left by last year's seniors. Gone are power hitting All-Americans Ashley Monceaux and Chelsi Lake, along with two-time All-Big 12 selection Lisa Ferguson and 2007 second-team All-Big 12 outfielder Miriam Romero. That, however, doesn't seem to worry Moore and his staff. They know they have a team that is hungry to carry on the tradition, and have the talent to do it as well.

"This team is a breath of fresh air," Moore said. "We are young, but at the same time we have quite a bit of experience with that youth. We have a vibrance with our freshmen and newcomers that makes this team exciting. They are fun to coach. I never had a day of practice in the fall where I felt they didn't want to be there. This team takes advantage of every opportunity and the effort is always there."

This past fall was a great chance for the Baylor team to see just where it was at and what it needed to improve on. The Lady Bears finished the fall with a 12-2 record, but learned quite a bit about themselves along the way.

"The fall was just the opposite of what we expected, but in a good way," Moore said. "What we thought would be weak points were strong and what we thought would

be strong points were a little weaker. But having said that, I think we know this team well enough to know that those weak areas have potential to be strong and we can fix that. As a coach I have never wanted to reach the point of being one heartbeat in the fall; I want the team to be hungry for that, and I can sense that this team is ready for that to happen."

PITCHING

When a team loses the ace of the staff, most teams hit the panic button. Although the Lady Bears lost Ferguson, the Baylor career wins and appearances leader, and Monceaux, this staff knows they have the talent and depth to pick up where they left off.

"With Britni Newman's guidance, this staff is in good hands" Moore said. She was an outstanding pitcher and the pitching staff responds really well to her and she has done an outstanding job with them."

Leading this staff will be sopho-

more Kirsten Shortridge. The 2007 Big 12 Freshman of the Year was 17-6 with a 2.14 ERA in 34 appearances and 167 innings of work. Shortridge is no stranger to the spotlight after having picked up big wins during her freshman season, including 6.2 innings of relief work to clinch the Big 12 title.

"We are going to give the ball to Kirsten whenever the game is on the line and run with her," Moore said. "She is a truly gifted athlete and will be our number one to start the year."

Behind Shortridge is a wealth of talent. Junior Brittany Turner is coming off the best fall performance of her career and will see plenty of innings in the circle this spring. The Fort Worth, Texas native went 3-1 in 2007 with a 2.08 ERA in 33.2 innings of work, as opponents hit just .202 off of her.

"Brittany Turner had an outstanding fall for us," Moore said. "She had much more composure and control and I believe she is going to have a very solid year."

One player who turned heads in the circle this last fall was junior transfer Jenny Isham. An All-American at McLennan Community College, Isham brings both talent and experience to the staff. Last season at MCC, she compiled a 0.74 ERA with a 29-6 record and 285 strikeouts.

"Jenny Isham showed moments of excellence," Moore said. "I saw her become a pitcher that could be very dominating at times. It's all relevant to your competition you are facing, so you have to get into the season to see how some of that pans out, but she is exciting to watch out there."

Freshman Shaina Brock is another pitcher to watch as she was a late signee in the early summer of 2007. The Derby High School product was a four-time all-state performer in Derby, Kan., and has all the tools to be an excellent pitcher in the Big 12.

"Shaina Brock is the hardest throwing pitcher that we have," Moore said. "She has great enthusiasm and a lot of raw talent. When she is in sync, she can be unhittable."

With the depth and talent of his staff, Moore isn't worried about having one dominate pitcher.

"We have an exciting pitching staff," he said. "We may pitch by committee, but we have a pretty good committee."

CATCHING

After Baylor loses a two-year starter in Lake, Moore isn't worried about filling that hole left behind the plate.

"Chelsi was an offensive weapon," Moore said. "But Courtney Oberg is the best catcher we have ever had in this program, and she swings a pretty good bat, too."

Oberg will enter the 2008 season atop the depth chart after spending time last season as a designated player and catcher. The sophomore hit .287 with seven home runs and 34 RBI as a freshman. A great defensive player, Oberg threw out 10 runners in part-time duty.

Behind Oberg are a pair of freshmen in Jordan Vanatta and Colby Vanham.

Vanatta is an all-state performer out of West, Texas. Although she doesn't have much experience behind the plate, just like Lake, she swings a great bat and has the ath-



KIRSTEN SHORTRIDGE WILL LEAD THE BAYLOR STAFF IN 2008.



SENIOR SHORTSTOP MARITZA MARTINEZ

leticism to play.

"Jordan is going to be one of the best hitters to ever come through here," Moore said. "She is very competitive and is an outstanding athlete."

Vanham was also an all-state selection and was named 2007 Greater San Antonio Area 4A Catcher of the Year. The Uvalde, Texas, native will also look to see some time behind the plate.

"We have the best catching coach that I have ever had on my staff in Josh Newman," Moore said. "They have good guidance and he is someone who can watch them all the time and help develop that relationship between the pitcher and the catcher."

FIRST BASE

Losing the 6-2 Monceaux leaves a big gap at first, but Moore is not worried after the emergence of senior Jordan Daniels. Daniels started 37 of the team's 50 games as a sophomore in 2006 before being hampered by injuries as a junior.

"Jordan is a natural lefty and a sharp defensive player," he said. "She is also one of the better hitters we have had in our program. There is a lot that you can't teach about hitting, and Jordan has a lot of that."

If Vanatta emerges behind the plate, Oberg could also see some time over at first.

"Oberg is a great defensive player with a good glove," Moore said.

Another player to watch for is freshman Taylor Marcum. A power hitting righty, the Purcell, Okla., native was a two-time conference MVP and has the size and bat to see time at first.

SECOND BASE

Junior Alex Colyer returns to take the reigns at second base after a solid sophomore campaign that saw her hit .265 with six home runs and 18 RBI.

"Alex Colyer is probably the hardest worker on the team and she is a prime example of how hard work pays off."

Meagan Weldon will challenge for time at second, as the two-time all-state and offensive player of the year from New Caney, Texas showed a lot of potential in the fall.

"Meagan will be a great player with a lot of talent and I believe she is going to make Alex better," Moore said.

SHORTSTOP

Baylor returns one of its most talented defenders, as senior Maritza Martinez will look to grab hold of the starting shortstop position. Martinez started 34 games as a junior transfer last season, splitting time with Kelsey Sage who left the program to pursue a missionary career.

"Maritza is an All-American defensive player," Moore said. "She takes a lot of pride in her defense and I know

she can get the job done."

Pushing Martinez for time will be freshman KJ Freeland. A Tucson, Ariz., native, Freeland had a very successful career with her club team, the Tucson Roadrunners and was the 2007 defensive MVP at Pusch Ridge Christian Academy. She could also see time at second base.

THIRD BASE

If there is one position on the field that is not up for grabs, it would be third base. That has and will be held by junior Brette Reagan. The first two-time All-American in program history will look to continue climbing the Baylor record books as she embarks on another All-American campaign.

"Brette amazes me as a coach," Moore said. "Two years as an All-American and she has come back and outperformed her previous two years put together from a work standpoint. She has worked harder this year than any of the previous two years. She is becoming a smarter hitter and I think she is in for another outstanding year. She is a great player and she will go down as one of the all-time great players in history."

Reagan, a two-time All-Big 12 selection, hit .341 last season with 10 home runs and 46 RBI, while also setting a new school record for walks in a season with 45.

"She and Maritza love the game and work very well together on the left side of the infield," Moore said. "She makes big plays and is the one you want in the box when the game is on the line."

OUTFIELD

Although the Lady Bears lost a player who Moore called "one of the best defensive players I have ever had" in Romero, if you are looking for one of the strongest areas of the Baylor defense, look no further than the outfield.

Sophomore Tiffany Wesley will return to left field after an outstanding freshman campaign. The Baton Rouge, La., native started all 67 games for Baylor, hitting .291 and set a new school record for stolen bases with 36.



SOPHOMORE COURTNEY OBERG WILL BE BEHIND THE PLATE IN 2008.

Covering center will be her twin sister, Nicole Wesley. The sophomore started 58 games for the Lady Bears while batting .317 and stealing 27-of-28 bases.

When Shortridge is not pitching, the Keller, Texas product will be in right field, giving Baylor a dangerous trio to contend with.

"I think this is going to be one of the best outfielders we have ever put together," Moore said. "When Shortridge is not in the circle, we know there will be no one in the country who will have a faster outfield with the twins and Shortridge in the outfield. Their strength is chasing down balls and not letting them hit the ground. Those kids are not afraid to lay out."

When Shortridge is pitching, you could see Weldon roaming right, or junior transfer Sophia Lujan. Lujan was a 2007 first-team all-region selection at South Mountain CC in Arizona.

"Sophia is a great outfielder who has some experience and a lot of confidence." Moore said.

SPEED

If you know Baylor softball, you know it has become synonymous with speed, and 2008 is no exception. Beside the players on the field, Moore has a pair of speedsters waiting in the dugout. Sophomore Danielle Honnette saw action in 41 games last season, scoring 11 runs. The Jackson, Minn., native could also compete for time in the outfield.

The second player is no stranger to running. Senior Morgan Craig spent the last few years on the Baylor track team and will be a pinch runner for the Lady Bears this

season.

"When we need to score a run or steal a base, it is nice to know we have the speed and smart base runners to put in and get the job done," Moore said. "It is an important position for us."

SCHEDULE

The 2008 schedule begins at home for the seventh straight season as Baylor hosts Syracuse, Purdue and Centenary in the seventh annual Getteman Classic.

"I like opening up at home and playing in Getteman Stadium in front of our home crowd," Moore said. "It benefits our girls to have another day of practice and not have to spend that day as a travel day."

Following that is a trip to Palm Springs, Calif., where the Lady Bears will play five of their six games against teams that advanced to the 2007 NCAA Tournament, including Oregon, UMass, Arizona, UCLA and Cal State Fullerton.

A trip to Clearwater, Fla., for the USF Under Armour Classic will be highlighted by a chance to play the USA National Team. Add those tournaments to an already tough Big 12 schedule, and you have the makings of one of the nation's toughest schedules.

"You try to match your schedule to your team," Moore said. "The Palm Springs tournament will give us all the testing we need to see where our team is at early. I think the USF Under Armour Showcase will be the best field they have ever had. We are going to grow up a whole lot early in the year. I am going to tell you one thing, we are not going to take a step back."

ROSTER BREAKDOWN

CLASSIFICATION

- Seniors (3):** Jordan Daniels, Maritza Martinez, Morgan Craig
- Juniors (5):** Alex Colyer, Jenny Isham, Sophia Lujan, Brette Reagan, Brittany Turner
- Sophomore (5):** Danielle Honnette, Courtney Oberg, Kirsten Shortridge, Nicole Wesley, Tiffany Wesley
- Freshman (6):** Shaina Brock, KJ Freeland, Taylor Marcum, Colby Vanham, Jordan Vanatta, Meagan Weldon

HOME STATE

- Texas (12):** Alex Colyer, Morgan Craig, Jordan Daniels, Jenny Isham, Maritza Martinez, Courtney Oberg, Brette Reagan, Kirsten Shortridge, Brittany Turner, Colby Vanham, Jordan Vanatta, Meagan Weldon
- Arizona (2):** KJ Freeland, Sophia Lujan
- Louisiana (2):** Nicole Wesley, Tiffany Wesley
- Kansas (1):** Shaina Brock
- Minnesota (1):** Danielle Honnette
- Oklahoma (1):** Taylor Marcum

POSITION

- Pitchers (4):** Shaina Brock, Jenny Isham, Kirsten Shortridge, Brittany Turner
- Catchers (3):** Courtney Oberg, Jordan Vanatta, Colby Vanham
- Infielders (8):** Alex Colyer, Jordan Daniels, KJ Freeland, Taylor Marcum, Maritza Martinez, Courtney Oberg, Brette Reagan, Meagan Weldon
- Outfielders (5):** Sophia Lujan, Kirsten Shortridge, Meagan Weldon, Nicole Wesley, Tiffany Wesley
- Utility (2):** Morgan Craig, Danielle Honnette

ACQUISITION

- High School (15):** Shaina Brock, Alex Colyer, Jordan Daniels, KJ Freeland, Danielle Honnette, Taylor Marcum, Courtney Oberg, Brette Reagan, Kirsten Shortridge, Brittany Turner, Colby Vanham, Jordan Vanatta, Meagan Weldon, Nicole Wesley, Tiffany Wesley
- Junior College (3):** Jenny Isham, Sophia Lujan, Maritza Martinez
- Inter-School Transfer (1):** Morgan Craig



SENIOR JORDAN DANIELS WILL BEGIN 2008 AS BAYLOR'S STARTING FIRST BASEMAN.