



Season Preview

After arriving at Texas Tech just weeks prior to the start of the 2005 season, head coach Teresa Wilson set about the task of transforming the Texas Tech softball program into a winner. After finishing the 2005 campaign with a 23-25 record, a significant increase in winning percentage from the previous year, Wilson and the Red Raiders entered their first off-season together. Now with a full-year under her belt at the helm of the program, Wilson and the team will take on a formidable schedule and attempt to get the Red Raiders back to the postseason for the first time since the 2001 season.

The 2006 roster includes a mixture of 12 veterans, three of whom are seniors, one redshirt freshman and seven newcomers to the squad. In trying to ignite the drive in the older players and inspire the new, Wilson is working on building a solid foundation for the years to come. For Red Raider softball, 2006 poses the opportunity for them to transition into one of the top competitors in the Big 12 and in the country by facing the nation's best.

Schedule Overview...

It is said, "To be the best, you have to play the best," and that will be that mantra that the Red Raiders carry into the upcoming season. Beginning Feb. 9, Tech dives into a series of challenging pre-conference tournaments to prepare itself for Big 12 action and a potential postseason run. The early-season slate will not be an easy road as Tech will be matched up against some of the country's most established softball programs.

"I think throughout the course of the season we play perennial power Arizona twice and we will see every team with the exception of one or two that played in the College World Series last year," Wilson commented. "The schedule is going to be amazingly difficult. If we can finish at or above .500 we will have an opportunity for post-season play. And if we finish with that kind of record we will have beaten some very good teams. When you combine that kind of tournament season with the Big 12 season, you have a schedule that is going to be one of the toughest in the country."

Big 12 Action...

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this season, the Big 12 Conference has grown into one of the nation's top leagues for softball. This season Texas Tech hopes to join the leagues success by rising to the level of the conference's elite teams. Several of the conference's teams enter this season looking strong including 2005 conference regular-season champs Texas A&M and Big 12 Tournament champions Texas. In addition both Baylor and Oklahoma made Super Regional appearances in 2005.

"I think anytime you can look at the conference from top to bottom, with eight of 10 teams going to postseason, and say that the league is dominant. We hope to have results to add to that."

In the Circle...

Much of the success a softball team enjoys during a season is dependant on its performance in the pitching circle, and with a mixture of veterans and newcomers in the circle, great things are expected to from this season's pitching staff. Leading the staff will be seniors Erin Crawford and Julie Hauck.

A season ago Crawford, who will be a four-year letterwinner at Tech, led the Red Raiders in almost every pitching category including 14 wins, 132.2 innings pitched, a 3.11 ERA and 105 strikeouts. One of her highlights from 2005 includes pitching a season-high 10 innings in a 2-0 complete game victory over then-No. 6 Texas in Austin on April 26. Hauck, in her third year with the team, enters her final season in Lubbock after an impressive fall. As a junior in 2005, Hauck appeared in 25 contests and pitched 86 innings while leading Tech with three saves on the year. Sophomore Sarah Losleben is also back and looking to continue the success that she was able to enjoy in her first season in Lubbock. In her rookie campaign, Losleben had 31 appearances including nine starts, and compiled an 8-2 record and a 3.17 ERA with 77 strikeouts. Two new faces making their debut are local-products Alex Watkins and Megan Shupp, both of whom should prove to be valuable assets for the Red Raider pitching staff.

Catcher...

One of the new faces who will be counted on to make an impact this season will be sophomore Robyn Wike. Wike comes to Tech after playing a season at catcher for the University of Washington and will be counted on to help with the development and performance of the Red Raider pitching staff. Sophomore Jennifer Corkin will share time behind the dish after leading the team in batting average (.287), homeruns (5), RBI (35), slugging percentage (.493) and doubles (11) a year ago.

Infield...

Texas Tech returns the entire infield from a year ago and the group should prove to be a strength in 2006. As well as the solid group of veterans returning, a talented group of newcomers will press for playing time and add depth to the squad.

In the hot corner, at third is junior Natalie Kula. Last season she started 47 games and led the team with a .265 batting average during conference play. She posted seven multiple RBI games, including a career-high three on three occasions. Entering her third season at the shortstop position is junior Heather Parker. Parker started 48 games last season at shortstop and led the team with 21 runs scored. She was 5-of-7 on stolen base attempts on the year, including a perfect 3-for-3 in conference play. One of the Tech's most experience leaders, Heather Parker's presence in the infield will be a key for the Red Raiders. After starting all but one game at the position as a freshman in 2005, Jennifer Bowers returns as the team's everyday second baseman. Last season Bowers collected a .238 batting average 126 at bat and finished a perfect 7-for-7 on stolen base attempts, tying for the team. The duty of first base should be shared by junior Brandy Moulin and Corkin. In 2005, Moulin saw her batting average climb 34 points from .223 as a freshman to .257 in 2005 while starting 15 games at first base and 20 as a designated hitter.



Outfield...

The Red Raider outfield will be a mixture of both new and old faces. The anchor for the outfield will once again be junior centerfielder Ashley Parker. Last season as a sophomore, Parker started 30 games in centerfield and led off the Tech batting order 40 times. She collected a .262 batting average in 122 at-bats and led the team with seven stolen bases on eight attempts. Vying for the starting position in left field are redshirt freshman Montana Patin and sophomore Devin Zaragoza. Patin appeared in only three games last season, before receiving a medical redshirt while Zaragoza started 14 games in right field last year and batted .230 in 61 at bats, while posting a team-high three sacrifice flies and finishing third on the team with five stolen bases. Sophomore Whitney Riley will likely get the nod in right field. In 2005, Riley appeared in 37 games and collected a .211 batting average in 76 at bats with seven extra base hits. In addition, the Southlake, Texas, native scored 13 runs while driving in 10 runs and finished third on the team with five stolen bases on six attempts. Also playing a valuable leadership role on the team is senior Amanda Oakes. In 30 games in 2005, the Tulsa, Okla., native was a threat on the bases, scoring 11 runs and finishing a perfect 1-for-1 on stolen bases.

The Newcomers...

A team's future is only as good as the players entering the program. Joining the Red Raiders this year is a well-balanced mix of athletes who will be counted on to contribute in 2006. Freshmen Elizabeth Eimen, Brooke Neuman, Emily Niederhofer and junior Kristen Healy will press for playing time in the infield, with Niederhofer also able to contribute in the outfield. Watkins and Shupp could also potentially receive playing time in the field as well as in the circle as the newcomers are a versatile and athletic bunch.

"I really like our newcomers," Wilson said, "and I am excited for the season. When you see what these kids have committed, both returners and rookies, it's very pleasing. I have been coaching for almost 20 years and it is rare to see young ladies give their hearts and souls to something like these kids have. They have worked harder in the offseason and came together more than maybe any group that I have had in 20 years."