2011 BASEBALL & SOFTBALL

Cover by Matt Weir / The Collegian
Photos by Matt Weir and Mike Howells / The Collegian

Garrett Weber
Danny Muno
Haley Gilletland
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Veteran roster to lead Bulldogs

By Ben Ingersoll
The Collegian

Fresh off being crowned Western Athletic Conference regular-season champions just a season ago, Fresno State baseball is expected to not miss a beat.

Announced at the beginning of the month in the preseason coach’s poll, Fresno State was picked to take home this year’s title, receiving four of the conference’s seven first-place votes.

The ‘Dogs have taken home the conference regular-season championship four out of the last five seasons.

The Bulldogs finished 16-8 in the regular season last year, ahead of second-place finisher Nevada who finished 14-9-1. But reigning WAC Coach of the Year Mike Batesole’s 2010 team lost to Hawaii in the championship round of the WAC Tournament, leaving the Bulldogs on the outside looking in on the national tournament bid.

This year’s team, however, returns 22 from the 2010 roster, including All-American first baseman and last year’s WAC Player of the Year in Jordan Ribera. But Batesole said the same team that ousted his squad in last year’s final game poses arguably the biggest threat in conference play, and boasts one of the most prolific rosters the ‘Dogs will see this year.

“Hawaii has an outstanding pitching staff, probably the best pitching staff,” Batesole said. “They have the best player in the league in Kolten Wong. So they’re very tough and they’re very tough at home.”

Hawaii is second only to Fresno State in players represented on this year’s preseason All-WAC team. Fresno State seniors Ribera, Garrett Weber, Danny Muno and Greg Gonzalez, as well as juniors Dusty Robinson, Brennan Gowens and Trent Garrison round out the preseason first-team All-WAC Bulldogs.

Batesole said this year’s balanced roster (15 combined seniors and juniors, 13 combine sophomores and freshmen) is seasoned enough to handle any outside pressure of being the preseason favorites.

“We’ve got a veteran group. They’ll handle that part of it well,” Batesole said. “The WAC is not what we would consider to win it all.”

Heavy pressure was placed on the Bulldogs last year in the preseason before finishing the year 38-25. Muno was predicted to be the 2010 WAC Player of the Year and pitcher Derek Benny garnered preseason pitcher of the year. Muno was eventually selected second-team All-WAC while Benny recorded a 1-3 record and an 8.18 ERA.

Despite Benny’s disappointing 2010 campaign, Batesole insisted the junior, along with his teammates on the mound, could make-or-break where the Bulldogs finish this season.

“We had a handful of pitchers last year we expected to have better years than they did,” Batesole said. “So we need those guys to step up. We’ll probably go about as far as Benny, Poytress and Harlan take us.”

Poytress saw the biggest bulk of action last season, leading the team in innings pitched (76.2) en route to a 6-6 record. Harlan also lead the team last year in appearances with 29.

At the plate, Fresno State’s preseason all-conference players are stacked. Ribera, Robinson and Muno combined for 50 of the team’s 88 home runs. Muno was also second in the conference in runs scored with 59.

The 2011 preseason All-WAC selections, as well as the rest of the Fresno State lineup, have 35 home games slated for this season, looking to avenge a disappointing 18-17 home record from a season ago. But if there’s something Batesole is certain of heading into his sixth season as Fresno State’s head coach, it’s that conference play won’t yield for the ‘Dogs.

“There’s just no gimmes in our league, especially on the road,” Batesole said. “Each ball park is a little bit different and each team plays their home park very well.”

By Ben Ingersoll
The Collegian

Pitcer Derek Benny had a tough 2010 season with a 1-3 record and an 8.18 ERA. Head coach Mike Batesole said Benny and the pitching staff will dictate how far the Bulldogs go this year.
Hefty schedule and home series await Diamond ‘Dogs

Fresno State will face off with opponents from the Pac-10, Big Ten and Big 12 early this season

By Jerry Huerta
The Collegian

The road to the College World Series started this weekend for Fresno State when it played its annual alumni game. The Diamond Dogs play another daunting schedule this season, but will be at home most of the time. They begin the season with an eight-game home stretch and they play a total of 35 home games.

The NCAA leader in home runs last year, Jordan Ribera, gave some thoughts on the schedule.

“I’m definitely excited,” Ribera said. “We’ve got a pretty good preseason schedule with teams like, Gonzaga, Oregon State, USD [University of San Diego], Ohio State and Nebraska. Teams like those that are good caliber teams that we definitely look forward to playing.”

The Bulldogs play 12 of their opponents at home. One non-conference home game is against Pac-10 powerhouse Oregon State. The Beavers won the College World Series in 2006 and 2007. They also have been in the post-season five out of the last six years.

The senior first baseman recognizes the importance of so many home games for this year’s team.

“It’s going to play in our favor,” Ribera said. “Obviously, any time you play at home it’s a lot better to have your crowd supporting you. I think it’s exciting for us seniors we get to play so many home games in front of our fans and family. I think it’s going to fuel us to perform a little bit better because it’s our last go around. Now, we can compete in front of our crowd one more time.”

The Dogs battle another Pac-10 team at home with Washington State coming to Fresno. Last year, the Cougars went 37-22. They lost in the regional final against Arkansas.

Next, they face the Buckeyes from Ohio State. The Buckeyes went 28-23 overall on the season. They lost to Minnesota in the Big Ten Tournament. Fresno State plays against the San Diego Toreros, who won a share of the West Coast Conference title last year. They went to the College World Series and lost in the Tempe regional against Hawaii. They also won the head-to-head matchup against the ‘Dogs last season.

After the San Diego series, the Dogs dive into their conference schedule where they play Nevada. Last year, the Wolf Pack lost in the WAC Tournament against San Jose State.

Fresno State head baseball coach Mike Batesole thinks Nevada could be a contender late in the season.

“Reno has an outstanding offense and a deep pitching staff” Batesole said. Like Nevada, the Hawaii Warriors will also be visiting Fresno this season. They are fresh off a loss in the College World Series against Arizona State. The ‘Dogs won four out seven games against the Warriors last season.

Batesole also gave some thoughts on the defending WAC Tournament champion.

“Hawaii has an outstanding pitching staff and they’ve got the best player in the league in Kolten Wong so they’re very tough at home,” Batesole said.

The final opponent with a winning record from last season is New Mexico State. The Aggies won 35 games and lost 22. The Dogs won all four games against New Mexico State last season.

The College World Series winning coach talked about the schedule in general.

“It’s a very difficult schedule,” Batesole said. “We’ve made some sacrifices in the last couple years to make this schedule tougher this year because we think we’ve got a team that we expect to be able to handle it. We look at the home schedule especially with Oregon State opening weekend. We got Pepperdine and Ohio State here. It could turn out to be a difficult schedule at the end of the year. It could pan out to be very tough when we look back on it.”

PLAYING ACROSS AMERICA

OREGON STATE
Fresno, Calif.

WASHINGTON STATE
Fresno, Calif.

PEPPERDINE
Fresno, Calif.

WAC TOURNAMENT
Mesa, Ariz.

LOUISIANA
Baton, La.

NEBRASKA
Lincoln, Neb.

OHIO STATE
Fresno, Calif.

Hawaii
Fresno, Calif.

Infographic by Michael Uribes / The Collegian
From leading the nation in home runs to not getting drafted, it has been a crazy year for Fresno State slugger Jordan Ribera. Since not being drafted, Ribera is now back on campus for his senior season. The first baseman led the NCAA in home runs with 27 and also had 69 RBIs. He also led the team with 20 doubles and two triples.

He has been working hard to prepare for this year, his final season in a Bulldog uniform. “Just grind it out basically,” Ribera said. “Try to be one of the first ones here and one of the last ones to leave and know that this is senior year. This is it really. A lot of the seniors have really made this the year that they really have to go out with a boom because we’ve got to leave nothing on the field.”

Ribera hasn’t left anything on the field so far. After starting every game last season, he was named the WAC Player of the Year, first-team All-WAC and WAC Player of the Week. He is also tied for fifth place in Fresno State history in career home runs with 36.

All of these accomplishments have come after only starting 16 games as a sophomore and recording four homers with just 10 RBIs.

One of the Fresno State baseball coaches has seen the transformation by the Clovis native. “Jordy’s had quite a career,” Fresno State head baseball coach Mike Batesole said. “Where he’s come from as a freshman to what he did last year is pretty remarkable. Mostly, I’ve been the most impressed with is what he’s done defensively. You look back last year in 24 league games he didn’t make any errors. Overall, he probably started every game we had and I think he only had three errors on the year. And that was the big step we wanted to take last year. This year, we’re trying to take his defense to another level. Offensively he’s right on track to where he wants to be. The only thing left that we could work on is his two strike approach and he’s done an outstanding job since September of working on that.”

Batesole has seen Ribera’s development since playing in the College World Series during his freshman season and sees some good things in his future. “If he has another year like last year,” Batesole said. “I think he’s going to be pretty happy with the way June goes. Last year, for whatever reason he wasn’t drafted. So he went out and played in the most prolific collegiate league in college baseball the Cape Cod League. He led the league in home runs and RBI. He’s come back and had an excellent fall. We’ve had scouts at almost every scrimmage that we’ve had. So they’ve got a chance to go back and look at what they’ve missed and you won’t see that happen again this June.”

The Cape Cod league is the top collegiate summer baseball league in the country and players from the best baseball programs in it.

After playing in this league this past summer, the Clovis West graduate can’t wait to face a familiar foe. “Honestly, I can’t wait until opening night. Gonzaga’s a good team. They’re going to throw a lefty that is pretty good. He was in the Cape Cod League and we’ve played against him,” Ribera said.

Even though, the reigning WAC Player of the Year’s career is almost up, he still looks forward to gaining the goals the team has set for themselves this season. “It’s been a test for my character,” Ribera said. “Playing baseball has taught me more about life then I thought it would. I’m thankful for the coaches that I’ve had. And the group I’ve put myself around and all of my best friends on the team. I don’t regret anything since I’ve been here. I’m kind of sad that it’s my last year I get to play here but at the same time I’m looking forward with this group of guys and hopefully achieving something special.”
The 2011 Fresno State softball team has a handful of rising stars, but there is arguably none more pivotal than do-it-all junior Michelle Moses.

The Paso Robles, Calif. product has become one of the premier players on the team in the matter of one season. Moses was a sophomore sensation just a year ago, recording a 12-3 record and a team-best 2.07 ERA.

Moses is equally as dangerous from both the mound and first base, excelling at every position she has been called on to perform. Moses has started since her freshman season in 2009. That season she was the only freshman to start all 58 games, but had yet to prove herself as a pitcher. Moses went 0-2 as a freshman to go along with 7.70 ERA.

Since then, however, the junior has collected quite a few accolades in her young career with the Bulldogs. She was named first-team All-WAC last year and was named the Western Athletic Conference Pitcher of the Week award twice last season. Moses was also named to the All-Tournament team during the WAC tournament last year.

In the home-opening win this season over Sacramento State, Moses became the first Fresno State softball player to ever hit for the cycle in Bulldog history. In the game, Moses drove in two runs in a 5-4, 11-inning victory. She also pitched 5.1 innings Saturday.

She has proven that she is more than capable as both a pitcher and position player while her hitting totals continue to improve. She has shown that she can produce power behind the plate and even lead the team in home runs her freshman year. Moses pounded in a team-leading 19 home runs last season to go along with a .351 batting average.

As a pitcher, even though her experience is valued by the team, she is still willing to concede the leadership role to Fresno State’s four seniors on the roster.

“The seniors do lead and everyone else comes and works their hardest each day,” Moses said. Moses has been fine-tuning her game this off-season in order to develop into an even greater asset to her team. “We fixed things here and there,” Moses said. “We worked all fall on them.”

After a 41-21 campaign in 2010, Moses and company are excited about the coming months. “I[m] looking forward to coming out and playing,” Moses said. “We have some great returning players,” Moses said. Moses along with the rest of the Bulldogs finished 15-6 last year, good enough for second place in the WAC.

“Everyone’s coming back and [are] improved.” Moses said.

A lot is at stake this season for head coach Margie Wright’s team, and expectations are high. The Bulldogs were picked to finish second in the recent preseason coaches poll, and Moses, as well as two other Fresno State players were selected as preseason first-team All-WAC. But even though Moses has garnered her fair share of awards and recognitions in here two seasons in Bulldog red, the love of the game and simppling winning is what stands out the most.

“I don’t know, I love playing softball and I just try to go out there and play hard and get a win,” Moses said. “I want to win.”
The Fresno State softball team will once again have the honor of hosting the WAC tournament with the top six teams returning to Bulldog Diamond May 11-14 to compete for an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. This will be the second time in the last three years Fresno has hosted the double-elimination tournament, and their fifth overall. The Bulldogs have won three WAC Tournament titles, most recently in 2009, but fell last year to Hawaii.

Premier players like pitcher Michelle Moses and shortstop Hayley Gilleland already see the benefit of hosting at home through time management and crowd support.

“I definitely think it’s an advantage,” Moses said. “It’s our home field, we love playing at home in front of our fans, so we’re very excited to be hosting the WAC Tournament.”

Gilleland is more focused on the different preparation the time at home allows.

“I think it’s important that we get to sleep in our beds,” Gilleland said, “[We] get to wake up and do our own pre-routines, and do our own thing, and then get here come game time and be ready.”

Head coach Margie Wright said the timing of the tournament is also helpful as it falls during Fresno State’s final exam week.

“The most important thing is it’s the week of finals,” said Wright, “So it’s really really helpful to us to be able to take our finals, not be stressed out taking them on the road and being focused on what we are out here to do and that’s win the conference tournament.”

Admitting the advantages of playing at home, Wright also said that it doesn’t matter where the tournament takes place at that point in the season the team needs to be on the ball and playing well to continue participating in post-season play.

The 2010 WAC Tournament was held in Las Cruces, N.M. where the Bulldogs lost to WAC regular-season champion Hawaii, which earned its first ever WAC Tournament title and advanced to NCAA Tournament play.

Fresno State hosts the WAC Softball Tournament for the fourth time in six years

By Brandy Flores
The Collegian
Just getting beyond the Western Athletic Conference Tournament is not enough this year — this year’s squad is in it to advance past the regional round.

In head coach Margie Wright’s 25 years leading the Fresno State softball team, the Bulldogs have made the national tournament 24 straight times. But the Bulldogs have been eliminated in the regional round of the NCAA Tournament each of the last 11 seasons. In 2005, the Super Regional round was implemented, but the ‘Dogs have had trouble escaping elimination.

Wright insists this year’s senior and junior loaded roster is ready to make the jump back into national title contention.

“I think our four seniors have been the difference in our team stepping up our competitive level in the offseason, and I’m really looking forward to their seasons … Nobody likes to lose their last game, so I think they’ve been highly motivated and really looking forward to taking that next step,” Wright said.

Before Fresno State can set its eyes on the national prize, a big test looms in conference play. The Bulldogs were eliminated by Hawaii in last year’s WAC Tournament finale and were just 2-3 against the Rainbow Wahine all season.

Hawaii went on to be the Cinderella squad in the Women’s College World Series before being eliminated by Arizona. The Rainbow Wahine were recently picked to again take the Western Athletic Conference title in the preseason coaches poll, taking six of the eight first-place votes after a 19-1 conference record in 2010. Fresno State received the other two first-place votes.

But recent rule changes regarding the use of legal bats could impact how the matchup between the two schools plays out. A nationwide stricter rule enforcement on legal bats (proper weight and length, non-altered) could play in favor of the ‘Dogs when they square off in April’s ESPN-televised game.

“It’s going to be a battle, it always is,” Wright said. “They have a lot of their team back and we do too, so I think equipment is a little different this year so I think it’s going to be a little more of a level playing field and I think it will be some great games.”

Bulldogs Haley Gilleland, Michelle Moses and Caitlin Stiglich were selected to the 2011 preseason All-WAC team. Hawaii has five players on the team, two being selected as Preseason Player of the Year and Pitcher of the Year.

“This is a season like all the others,” Gilleland said of the seniors. “There’s no room for that and we’ve been busting our butts out here and doing everything we can to get better and get to that next level.”

By Ben Ingersoll
The Collegian

The Bulldogs and Rainbow Wahine square off in an ESPN-televised matchup in early April

WAC-favorite Hawaii poses biggest threat
### PETE BEIDEN FIELD

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### BULLDOG DIAMOND

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