

BC3 sets sights on 4th WPCC softball crown in row

March 27, 2019



Members of Butler County Community College's 2019 softball team are, top row, from left, Abby Black, Bailey Campbell, Gracie Cornetti and Mackenzie Craig. Middle row, from left, Alyssa Dailey, Amber Izzo, Abby Kopac and Casey Kretzer. Bottom row, from left, Makenzie McDowell, Sydney Natili, Lauren Smith and Jesse Yenick.

(Butler, PA) The Butler County Community College softball team returns five players from a 2018 squad that won the program's third consecutive Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference crown, and will rely on its seventh through ninth batters in the order in seeking a fourth, second-year head coach Dan Beebe said.

Sydney Natali, Alyssa Dailey, Bailey Campbell, Jesse Yenick and Lauren Smith were members of a 2018 BC3 squad that finished 5-3 in an inclement-weather-shortened season and clinched the program's fifth WPCC championship since 1990.

"It's always nice," Beebe said, "to have returning players who have been there, done that."

The key to 2019, Beebe said, may hinge on Campbell, freshman Gracie Cornetti and Smith, who may bat seventh through ninth for BC3, which is 36-11 in the past three seasons and is seeking its second National Junior College Athletic Association Division III Region XX title since 2017.

"In any team's batting order, you expect hitters 1 through 6 to hit," said Beebe, the 2018 WPCC coach of the year. "Getting production from your 7 through 9 hitters is when you win championships. The bottom of our order knows its role. We look to get production from them and roll it back over to the top of the lineup."

Don't underestimate the bottom of the batting order, said Campbell, a first baseman and Mars Area High School graduate who hit .368 for the Pioneers in 2018.

"I think we definitely have an important role as far as starting the batting order off again," Campbell said. "We have to bring it around as far as getting everyone who is on base, or who is hopefully on base, back through and home and get the runs."

Added Smith, a Seneca Valley High graduate and outfielder: "You need to have hits. Start the batting order over again."

Natali, a shortstop and graduate of Knoch High who hit .333 in 2018, will lead off, followed by second baseman Alyssa Dailey, a Moniteau High graduate who with a .450 batting average last season is the Pioneers' leading returning hitter. Amber Izzo, a freshman outfielder from Mohawk High, will bat third.

The middle of the order includes third baseman Abby Black and pitcher Abby Kopac, freshmen and Knoch High graduates; and sophomore outfielder Yenick – "A good collection of strong hitters," Beebe said, "who should get RBI opportunities with the top of our lineup in front of them."

Yenick hit .348 in 2018 and in the WPCC title game drove in three runs as the Pioneers survived a seventh-inning Garrett College rally and posted a 7-6 victory. Campbell and Dailey went on to be named to the all-WPCC team.

"The star of each game" in 2019, Beebe said, "could come from any of our players."

That includes sophomore outfielder Mackenzie Craig, a Karns City High graduate who in December became the seventh BC3 volleyball All-American since 1999 and finished her women's basketball career at BC3 as the program's all-time leading scorer and rebounder.

Makenzie McDowell and Casey Kretzer, infielder/outfielders and Knoch High graduates, are among the Pioneers' freshmen with Kopac, who figures to be the Pioneers' ace in the circle, Beebe said.

"She is an amazing pitcher," added Cornetti, a catcher and Knoch High graduate. "She is really good at hitting her spots. She has great speed and it is hard to hit off of her."

Said Natili of Kopac: "She will be a really good asset to the team. She is a great pitcher."

The Pioneers, whose 2018 season ended with a 4-3 loss to Suffolk County Community College, Brentwood, N.Y., in the NJCAA Division III Region XX playoffs, may be great again in 2019, Natili said.

"I think from last year we know how to win," she said. "We have a lot more players who have more experience, and overall we have a better team this year. We need to always keep pushing and work hard. If we get down in a game, we always have to keep working to get back up and win the game."

Beebe agrees.

"If we can continue to build this one brick at a time, I like our chances to compete for the WPCC title and," he said, "potentially more."