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GO HUSKIES

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DOMINANT DAWGS

*Mighty
in the
Women*

HEAD COACH HEATHER TARR & UW SOFTBALL
HAVE THEIR SIGHTS SET ON OKC & THE WCWS

THE RIGHT CHEMISTRY

Agan
FR 00
LA

Kotzelnick
FM 23
SK

Hee
SR 31
NH

Reynolds
JR 10
SR

Espinoza
JR 21
SE

Lynch
SO 27
LK

Plain
SR 16
GP

Moore
SR 28
PM

Gibson
GR 32
KG

Huskey
JR 9
MH

WITH A RARE MIX OF
TALENT, TEAMWORK, AND DRIVE,
UW EYES THE WOMEN'S
COLLEGE WORLD SERIES TITLE.

BY MIKE KORD
FOR GDHUSKIES MAGAZINE

The 2021 UW softball season begins as so many have previously. The Huskies again are ranked nationally (No. 2 in the NFCA/USA Today preseason poll), a crew of outstanding players returns, and winning the Women's College World Series is an attainable objective.

And yet, this year is like no other.

In 2020, the No. 2 Huskies were charging into Pacific-12 Conference play with a 23-2 record when the season was abruptly canceled, the morning of our game against Team USA. The residual effect was a 15-day delay to fall practice and a 2021 schedule that was still being sorted out as of late January.

If anything, the unpredictability of 2020 has prepared the Huskies for the uncertainty of 2021. No one knows this better than two-time All-American pitcher Gabbie Plain from Harrington Park, Australia, who went back home after the season was canceled.

"I got lucky," said Plain, a senior. "I made it back before Australia shut down the borders to people outside the country." With UW facilities closed, players had to get creative in their sudden offseason training. "Everybody went home and had their own systems and methods," said junior leftfielder Sami Reynolds.

Two of Reynolds' cousins play at Western Washington University, so the three would train together. "We would go to random parks when we could, and take all of our old softballs from like 12U. It was ragtag," she said, "but it was awesome. We made it work."

So why are the Huskies ranked No. 2 heading into 2021? Every player who saw the field last season returns. That includes shortstop Sis Bates, who was voted to ESPN's greatest all-time college softball team last year. For context, Bates joined icons such as Jennie Finch, Jessica Mendoza, and Dot Richardson on the team. She is the reigning two-time Pac-12 Defensive Player of the Year and a two-time All-American.

Continued on page 6

Atlee
5Y 7
TA



THE RIGHT CHEMISTRY

Helm
SR 24
EH

Nelson
SR 3
BN

Bates leads a quartet of decorated teammates who recently were named to the USA Softball Preseason Player of the Year Watchlist. Joining her is Plain, catcher Morganne Flores, and infielder Baylee Klingler.

"I always credit my teammates when I get those awards because my teammates allow me to be who I am and they always push me to be the best that I can be," Flores said. Fans who like offense will want to make each game required viewing. The Huskies batted .365 last year, third in the nation. They scored 7.68 runs per game, fourth in the nation.

Bates hit .529 in 2020. That would have put her at No. 6 nationally if not for missing 10 games because of a concussion and falling short of the required minimum at bats. In 2019, Flores went on a monumental tear, belting 23 homers (tied for 4th in the NCAA), driving in 61 runs, and earning second-team All-American honors. Those numbers dipped in 2020, but almost certainly would have risen had conference play not been canceled.

Klingler, a junior, made her mark with a .481 average that ranked 21st in the nation. She went yard twice in a 12-2 victory over No. 3 Oklahoma. As a sophomore last season, Reynolds became that hitter pitchers just hate to face. Bring the heat inside, and the left-handed slugger will pull it into the right-field corner. Pitch her away and she'll line a shot over the third baseman. "Just throw me a strike and I'll be happy," Reynolds said. Her .424 average — up nearly 100 points from her freshman year — certainly made 17th-year head coach Heather Tarr happy.

The team's run production isn't limited to a handful of bashers. This lineup is deep. Fourth-year second baseman Taryn Atlee has seen her batting average rise from .220 as a freshman to .441 last year. Junior infielder SilentRain Espinoza hit .391 with four homers and four doubles last year, which gave her a .661 slugging percentage. She also tallied 19 RBIs in 21 games played. Sophomore Kelley Lynch, the 2019 Gatorade High School National Player of the Year, pitches and plays first base, and is one of the more versatile — and critical — players on the team.

Never was that more apparent than early last season, when Lynch hit a towering three-run homer and pitched 5 1/3 scoreless innings in a 7-0 thrashing of No. 5 Florida State. That was the same Seminoles team that topped the Huskies in the 2018 Women's College World Series final. Lynch had a team-leading eight homers when the 2020 season ended.

Defensively, the Huskies are clinicians in the field. Washington had a .982 fielding percentage last season, good for No. 4 in the nation. Bates is credited for her glove, but her footwork—the envy of just about any Major League Baseball prospect—allows her to get in front of balls hit to her left or right and deliver quick-release strikes to first base with legendary consistency and fluidity. She commits errors less frequently than other shortstops catch colds (her last boot occurred in May 2019). "She's literally the best shortstop any of us has ever played with," Flores said. "But what I think makes her so awesome is she brings energy every day to the field and just brings a positive vibe to whatever the situation is."

Atlee has 140 starts as a Husky and earned All-Pac-12 third team honors in 2019. Flores also was stellar behind the plate and won the Johnny Bench Award, which is given annually to the nation's best catcher. She has committed just two errors in 187 games started, both occurring in 2017.

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Bates
GR 22
SB



Klingler
JR 8
BK



Atlee
5Y 7
TA



Helm
SR 24
EH

Nelson
SR 3
BN

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Bates
GR 22
SB



Klingler
JR 8
BK



THE RIGHT CHEMISTRY



1

Torraca
JR 13
FT

Schiele
SR 6
LS

Quiñones
JR 1
AQ

Cummings
FR 19
JC



Plain
SR 16
GP



Reynolds
JR 10
SR

The team's run production isn't limited to a handful of bashers. This lineup is deep.

Willis
FR 66
SW

Espinoza, Ari Quilones (.400), and Megan Vandegrift (.200) provide infield experience around the horn. Brook Nelson will spend time at pitcher and first base. Raigan Barrett and Stormy Kotzelnick are freshman newcomers. Junior Emma Helm and freshman Jennifer Cummings back up Flores behind the plate, and senior Noelle Hee is a notable pinch-hitter.

Sophomore centerfielder Jadelyn Allchin started all 25 games last year and hit .294. She's one of the rangiest players in the nation, demoralizing hitters who think they've just knocked a base hit only to see Allchin chase the ball down in the alley. "There are plays that she makes that you think 'Oh, that's going to drop in for a single,' and then out of nowhere, she just comes in and dives and makes the play," Flores said.

Senior Livy Schiele started 14 games in right field and hit .359. Senior Kaija Gibson (.292) and junior Madison Huskey (.222) also saw time in right field. Junior Francesca Torraca and freshman Lilly Agan round out the outfield.

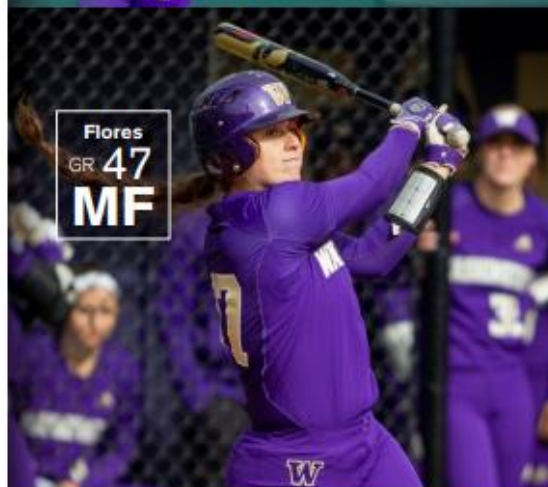
The Huskies possess a talented pitching staff led by Plain, a two-time All-American who has gone 56-9 with a 1.39 ERA and 521 strikeouts in 418.1 innings pitched in two-plus seasons. Opponents are hitting a meager .165 against the composed Aussie. "Sometimes, I'll just walk out to the mound and talk to her and say, 'Hey, what's up? Are you good?' And she says, 'Yep, I'm good,'" Flores said. "It doesn't matter what situation we're in. She's like, 'Let's go.' So I think it's awesome to have that attitude on the mound. She just knows she's going to win, and it rubs off on all of us."

It's a long way from Harrington Park, a small suburb of Sydney, to Montlake. Seattle's reputation for unfriendly weather had Plain looking mostly at southern schools until a UW alum convinced her dad to consider Washington. So Plain and her father visited Seattle, saw the beauty of the city and the school's unique academic and athletic qualities. Plain put UW at the top of her list. "We just essentially spammed all the coaches with e-mails and videos," Plain said. "Luckily, one of the coaches opened it and got it touch. There was a bit of chance and luck. But in the end, I felt really comfortable with the coaches and their values, and family, and supporting each other and helping everyone grow, not just as softball players but as individuals. I really clicked with that."

When everyone in the stadium knows a heater is coming, Plain can saw off a hitter with a throw that touches 70 miles per hour. But she also delights in throwing an array of pitches that keeps hitters off balance. "I've always found it fun learning new pitches, and when I was able to do different things with them," Plain said. "So I just enjoy challenging myself in different situations to throw pitches that I wouldn't normally throw. I kind of like throwing everything."

She credits pitching coach Lance Glasoe for her progress. "He likes to make sure we understand not only who we're throwing to but why we throw to them the way we do. His philosophy is, 'You're big girls now. You should know how to throw. If you need help, I'll be here.' Mostly it's about getting smarter at this stage." On Plain's off days, the Huskies will look to senior Pat Moore to continue the success she experienced in 2020. Moore went 6-0 with a 2.05 ERA. Nelson went 3-0 with 2.65 ERA, and freshman Sarah Willis might see time on the mound and in the outfield. The staff's WHIP was 1.22, and opponents hit just .215.

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Flores
GR 47
MF



Barrett
FR 11
RB

Allchin
SO 42
JA

"We don't care who's on the other side of the dugout. If we just bring Husky Softball to whomever we're playing, we're going to win. And we've always had that mindset."

THE RIGHT CHEMISTRY

Vandegrift
JR 2
MV

The Huskies have 14 appearances in the Women's College World Series, won the title in 2009, and the bitterness of 2018 is still a fresh taste. Before getting back to Oklahoma City, where the WCWS is played, Washington faces a gauntlet of talented teams in Pac-12 action. Top-ranked UCLA, the 12-time champion, won it all in 2019. Eight-time champion Arizona is ranked No. 3. Oregon, who has yet to win it all, is ranked 10th, and two-time champ Arizona State is ranked 16th. Stanford and Utah are just outside the top 25. "We always say we're playing nine girls named Sally," Flores said. "We don't care who's on the other side of the dugout. If we just bring Husky softball to whomever we're playing, we're going to win. And we've always had that mindset."

UW players talk a lot about having the right mentality. It's part of the philosophy Coach Tarr delivers. Don't dwell on the past or forecast the future. Be in the moment. Success will grow from there. "I think that this year, we have all the right pieces. We have all the right chemistry," Flores said. "And there's really no reason why we shouldn't win it all this year. And it would literally mean everything to me and my teammates."

Concussion = Brain Injury



The **Brain Injury Alliance of Washington** provides free services to individuals throughout Washington whose lives are affected by Brain Injury.

WA Brain Injury Resource Line
877-824-1766

Keeping Youth Safe Playing The Sports They Love



Learn more about preventing and living with Brain Injury at biawa.org