

ESG — Softball

Pinpoint pitching propels Western

by MATT KRUEGER
Reporter

The Western Region softball team bounced back from losing its first three games and survived a grueling three-way tie to earn a bronze medal last year. This time around, coach Joe Catalano and the players are looking to make things a little easier as they go after the gold.

Playing in a sport that revolves around pitching, Western has strengthened its roster with a pair of aces on the mound.

East Amherst's Chelsea Plimpton is easily the best pitcher to come out of Section VI in recent years and may be the best ever. She led Williamsville South to two New York State titles. In five years, she threw 10 perfect games and 78 shutouts to set new state records. She also holds the top two state marks for strikeouts in a season with 411 (2006) and 407 (2007). She had a career earned-run average of .34.

After a stellar career at Kenmore West, Keleher rewrote the record books at St. Bonaventure University, setting new school marks in career wins, strikeouts and shutouts. She also broke season records in shutouts and strikeouts.

"Both of those girls are shutdown pitchers," Catalano said. "And they should be pretty good, since we have their catchers on the team too."

Western will rotate Williamsville's Michelle Friday and Buffalo's Anna Nagro at catcher, depending on who pitches. Friday caught Plimpton for four years at Williamsville South, while Nagro caught Keleher for four years at St. Bonaventure. So it's simple, when Plimpton pitches, Friday catches, and when Keleher pitches, Nagro catches.

Aside from two strong batteries charging the

team, Western will also rely on a healthy does of experience. Five players, Orchard Park's Brittany and Ashley Bonetto, Williamsville's Dana Carter, Lancaster's Tessa Paolini and Alden's Jordan Rutkowski, are making their fourth appearance at the Games, while two more, Depew's Kristen Brunetto and Nagro, are going to their third ESGs. Only Williamsville's Mary Russell and Emily Thompson of Niagara Falls are new to the team this year.

"We have a lot of experience," Catalano said. "That's great. These girls have been here before and know what it's all about. It's sad, though, because I had to cut some girls from last year's team, girls who really helped us. As a coach I hate to do that."

Brittany Bonetto, Russell and Rutkowski make up a strong defensive outfield for Western, while the infield is loaded with Carter at first base, Paolini and Joelle Brunetto at second, Buffalo's Lauren Picciano at third and Ashley Bonetto at short stop.

"I like this team," Catalano said. "We'll compete for a medal. We're hoping to get the gold."

Made up entirely of girls from the Buffalo area, Western has the benefit of several players from Division I colleges like St. Bonaventure, Niagara University and the University at Buffalo.

"There are a lot of Division I colleges in Buffalo," Catalano said. "Rochester doesn't have that. That makes a difference. A lot of the best softball players come from here and stay here for college."

The team has already played in three tournaments to prepare for the Empire State Games and won the Aunt Rosie's Tournament this past weekend at the Amherst Pepsi Center.

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East Amherst's Chelsea Plimpton is one half of a powerful one-two punch on the mound for the Western Region softball team. Plimpton and Tonawanda's Christine Keleher should give Western a strong chance to improve on last year's bronze-medal performance.

Photo by John Rusac
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ESG — Round-up

Archers, cyclists, lax players among those seeking medals

They may not participate in the flashiest of sports, but don't try telling the athletes that their chosen sport isn't as important when the Empire State Games kick off July 23 in Binghamton.

The medals gained by some of these athletes in the past have helped Western maintain its status as the region leader in total medals, while others are looking to join the mix in their Games' debut.

Below is a list of athletes who will be competing in the 31st annual Games, from July 23-27, by sport:

Archery

The Fabiszewski clan from

Cheektowaga — Jennifer on the scholastic squad, and the father-son duo of Richard (coach) and Ricky on the open team — is hoping to do well once again in 2008. Jennifer placed second in 2007 in the all-around individual competition and also brought home a silver medal in the team category. Ricky, meanwhile, placed fifth as a scholastic team member last summer.

Sloan's William Carey will also participate on the open men's team, while Elma's Luke Weber will be a member of the scholastic men's team.

Boxing

Wendy Casey is listed as a mem-

ber of the Western Region open women's boxing team but she will definitely have the hometown advantage on her side for this year's Empire State Games.

Casey, who lives in Williamsville, is originally from Binghamton.

Casey will compete for Western in the women's open lightweight 63-kilogram division. Casey won gold in 2007 and silver in 2006.

The heavy-handed Casey is coming off a second-place finish at the United States Future Stars Women's National Championships in March in Colorado Springs, Colo.

She's also a two-time New York

State Golden Gloves female light welterweight champion and took bronze at Golden Glove nationals two years ago.

Cycling

Williamsville resident Peter Cummings, a Masters competitor in 2003 (sixth in the Time Trial 35-44 year old division), will be coaching Western's open team, which includes East Aurora resident Jason Skalski.

Judo

Amherst resident and Williamsville North senior-to-be Kaitlyn Barone will look for gold in the open women's 48-kilogram after taking silver in 2006 and 2007.

Also competing are Orchard Park's Kara Mather (open women's 52-kg) and Amherst's Yasuhiro Abe (open men's 66-kg).

Western is coached by Elma's

Andy Boulet and Amherst's Sal Barone.

Lacrosse

Orchard Park's Jeff Tundo scored three goals to aid Western in securing the bronze medal in the 2007 Games and will return to help the blue and red go for gold this year.

Tundo was instrumental in leading the Orchard Park Quakers to their 14th consecutive Section VI Class A championship this past spring.

East Aurora's Jonathan Lawless also returns to the Western team. He made eight saves in two games, including the bronze-medal clinching victory over New York City, in last year's games.

West Seneca's Ethan Murphy will make his first trip to the ESGs.

Molnar

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has won five team gold medals in a row at the Empire State Games and has the roster to add a sixth this year.

Western may only have two returners from last year's championship team, including the defending all-around champion Kaitlyn Lopez of Buffalo, but adding girls like Tonawanda's Sarah Nadrowski and Lancaster's Amanda Recor have bolstered the team.

"I think we have a really good shot at winning," Lisa Stumpf said. "I know Adirondack has a lot of good kids, but looking at our team, we have a lot of high level kids. A lot of them are Level 10

gymnasts. Half of them have a shot at winning. They're all good competitors. Whomever stays on the beam should win."

Nadrowski and Recor finished second and third, respectively, in the all-around competition at last November's Section VI Championships.

Rounding out the team are North Tonawanda's Emilie Fose, Rochester's Elizabeth Gangale, Lancaster's Mary Hamilton and Kenmore's Katelyn Schmitt.

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Scholastic

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pretty fun to get back to some of your old friends from a few years back."

He said that the competition offers a nice break from all the school meets, which can get repetitive.

"You always hope to go in there and take a gold medal," he said. "Usually I'm at school, but with this, if you can go and dominate,

that's what you want to do."

Matt's brothers, Lucas and Reece, will also be competing. Lucas, who attends Arizona State University, will participate in the 152-pound freestyle and 152-pound Greco-Roman events. Reece, who attends the University at Buffalo, will take part in the 139-pound Greco-Roman competition.

Richard Brown of Cheektowaga and William Bauer of Williamsville will also participate in the open division. Brown will wrestle freestyle at 214 pounds and Bauer will wrestle Greco-Roman at 167 pounds.

Open and scholastic wrestling will be held Thursday to Saturday at Binghamton University's West Gym.

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