

FERRIS STATE DIAMOND DAWGS

2002 SEASON PREVIEW

Execute, Perform ... There's No Excuses. That's the motto adopted by the Ferris State University softball team for the 2002 season as the Bulldogs focus on regaining their commitment to winning and starting a new legacy in the program's recent success on the diamond.

Ferris State will seek to erase the memories of last season's disappointing 22-23 campaign as the Bulldogs approach this season with renewed optimism and vigor. The Bulldogs finished seventh overall in the final Great Lakes Intercollegiate Conference (GLIAC) standings a year ago and were 13-7 in regular-season conference play.

"I'm really looking forward to this season," said FSU softball head coach **Keri Becker**, who enters her sixth year this spring as the winningest coach in the program's 29-year history. "We have a larger talent pool and ever since fall practice, I've been comfortable with our team chemistry . . . it's been unbelievably good.

"All of them are extremely focused on achieving their team goals. They have shown continued improvement and aren't afraid to push each other. I can foresee a positive, bright future for these kids," added Becker.

In fact, Becker envisions this season's squad much like the one five years ago (1997), which went on to make back-to-back NCAA Division II Championship appearances in 1998 and '99.

"They possess that same winning mindset and drive," said Becker. "We have a great group of skilled players who will do whatever it takes to be successful. The leadership on this year's team runs deep in the ranks and everyone is on the same page."

The Bulldogs return four of their five top hitters and a pair of top pitchers from a season ago. The eight returnees, five of whom are underclassmen, join 10 freshmen to give Ferris one of its youngest teams in several years.

While FSU will be young in terms of experience, Becker believes the talent level of depth from top to bottom of the lineup will more than compensate.

"When you have a team make-up like we have, with 10 freshmen, naturally there are a lot of question marks," Becker said. "I think the one thing that we have this year is competition. There will be a lot of people pushing each other this season because of our depth."

The Bulldogs will continue to emphasize pitching and defense, but an increase in offensive production is needed this time around after last season's squad struggled at the plate as evidenced by scoring 3.2 runs per game with a .231 batting average.

"Defensively we're just as strong if not stronger than last year because of our depth," stated Becker. "I believe we have the ability to score runs this season and we're definitely going to perform better on offense."

While improvement should be witnessed on the field, Ferris has already made significant moves in upgrading the program's facilities with a new press box, more bench seating, a batting cage and a bullpen area to name a few.

In all, Ferris State's future continues to shine bright with young, outstanding student-athletes, a tremendous coaching staff and an ever-improving facility to support a first-class program.

"It's great to have these amenities for our players and fans," said Becker. "This signifies what we have accomplished and will enable us to accomplish more in the future."

PITCHING

This area should be a stronghold for Ferris as two of the team's starting pitchers from a season ago in senior **Jennifer Colvin** and junior **Amanda Opbroek** are back in the circle. The ability of the two right-handed hurlers to keep FSU close in games will be a critical factor in its success. Colvin, the lone holdover from the 1999 NCAA-II Championship-qualifying team, was 7-7 last season with five saves in a team-leading 112.2 innings pitched. She made 24 appearances on the mound while posting team bests in earned run average (2.11) and strikeouts (98). At the plate, the slugger totaled seven extra-base hits (six doubles) and 11 runs batted in. Joining Colvin in the starting rotation is Opbroek, who compiled a 6-8 mark last year to go along with a 2.20 earned run average in 18 contests. Opbroek had 18 hits for extra-bases last season which included a team-high 14 doubles – two shy of tying the school's single-season record. She

also notched nine multi-hit game efforts and led the Bulldogs with four multiple RBI games. A pair of promising freshmen **Rachel Chartier** and **Stefanie Keenan**, a California import, are expected to receive duty in certain situations. More importantly, both will be afforded an opportunity to develop their skills as they learn the collegiate game in a comfortable situation this spring thanks to the arms of Colvin and Opbroek.

INFIELD

A new face is guaranteed of being behind the plate this season as four-year regular Anne Koltvedt has graduated. Battling for the starting catching duties are freshmen **Melissa Worsley** and **Jenny Wenzel**, both of whom are capable performers equally with the glove and bat. The two newcomers are also knowledgeable in pitch calling and possess leadership qualities. Regardless of who starts, both are expected to receive a considerable amount of action throughout the season.

Senior **Casey Scully** will assume the duties at first base with the departure of Mila Prieur to graduation. Scully, who has the versatility to play in the outfield, led the Bulldogs in hitting last season with a .314 batting average and had 33 hits in 36 games. She placed tied for 22nd among the conference's batting leaders and has rededicated herself in 2002 to putting up even better numbers in her final season. Sophomore **Courtney Grady** is the backup, but should receive increased playing time this season after showing significant improvement both in the field and at the plate during fall drills. **Danielle Maxwell**, a junior college transfer, is being redshirted and will hone her defensive skills.

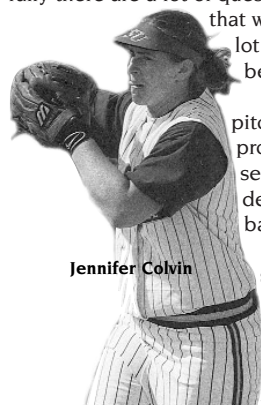
Second base is up for grabs with a number of capable candidates vying for the starting nod. A trio of freshmen – **Navreet Gill**, **Krista Martelli** and **Carrie Shine** all bring different talents to the position and Becker has no doubts any one of them will perform admirably. Who earns the starting job will likely hinge upon each individual's offensive production. A pure utility player, Gill may also see time in the outfield. Martelli has an exceptional bat and adds power to the lineup while Shine is regarded as a fundamentally-sound player.

The right side of the infield is solidified with the return of sophomores **Nicki Merchant** at shortstop and **Dana Peuler** at third base. Both played consistently well in their initial collegiate seasons as Merchant placed third in team batting with a .272 average and had a team-leading 43 hits while Peuler registered 30 base hits to finish fifth among the squad's top batting average leaders. The two also proved equally effective in the field as Merchant posted a .939 fielding percentage while Peuler garnered a .950 percentage as the pair combined to commit only 18 errors in 45 games. While those were sufficient numbers for a first-year player, Becker believes both are capable of improving on last season's performance.

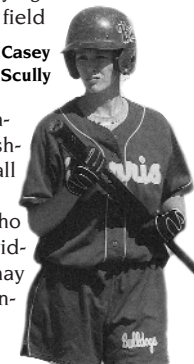
OUTFIELD

A spot in Ferris' outfield isn't going to come easy in 2002, with at least nine players vying for three coveted positions. The lone holdovers from last year are leftfielder **Amanda Opbroek** and sophomore centerfielder **Krista Johnson**. Opbroek will once again contend for the starting job in left field when not pitching. The fleet-footed Johnson,

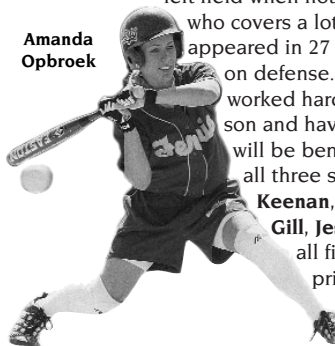
who covers a lot of territory and has a good arm, appeared in 27 contests last season and was flawless on defense. She struggled offensively, but has worked hard to improve her bat during the off-season and having a year's experience under her belt will be beneficial. Since there are no definites at all three spots, a group of freshmen – **Stefanie Keenan**, **Sadie Deurloo**, **Megan Riggs**, **Navreet Gill**, **Jessie Wright** and **Melissa Worsley** could all figure somewhere in the mix. Keenan's primary strength lies in her throwing arm, the best on the team, while Deurloo, Gill, Wright and Worsley all bring athleticism to the position. Riggs, Wright and Worsley displayed proficiency on offense during fall practice. Sophomore **Jessica Laidlaw** will likely be utilized primarily in a pinch-running capacity once again.



Jennifer Colvin



Casey Scully



Amanda Opbroek

