

Softball Has Record-Setting Season

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While the 2006 season ended on a disappointing note for the UW-Eau Claire fastpitch softball team, this year's Blugold squad will be one of the most remembered and acclaimed teams in school history.

On the final day of the NCAA Rock Island Regional, the unbeaten Blugolds needed just one win to advance to the eight-team national tournament in Raleigh, North Carolina. Instead, Coe College of Iowa pinned two one-run losses on the Blugolds to end a dominating and dramatic campaign.

Adding to the shock of a sudden conclusion to the two-month ride was the fact that the Blugolds had a 5-1 lead in the second game only to have Coe score the winning run in the bottom of the seventh with two out. But that was something the Blugolds had done on numerous occasions to a variety of opponents throughout the season.

The Blugolds finished with the best winning percentage in school history at 37-6 (.860), bettering the 35-8 (.814) mark set in 1997. They were ranked No. 10 in the final NFCA (National Fastpitch Coaches Association) Division III national poll.

The Blugolds became the first team to go unbeaten through the regular season Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) schedule since a round robin schedule was instituted as they took a third straight league title with a 14-0 mark. The Blugolds also knocked a monkey off their back as they won the post-season tournament to become the first regular season champ or No. 1 seed to also win the post-season tournament since 1999. The previous two years, they were upended in their bid to gain the WIAC's automatic berth in the NCAA tournament.

During the season, the Blugolds put together an 18-game win streak to break the previous school mark of 12 set last year, then followed the loss that snapped the streak with another 13-game win streak, giving them 31 wins in 32 outings between March 20 and May 13.

Five of the Blugolds' six losses came at the hands of teams that participated in the 59-team NCAA tournament including two to national runner-up St. Thomas, Minnesota. Four of the Blugolds' six losses were by a single run and the other two were by two runs.

The Blugolds were 10-4 in one-run games and 6-0 when a game was extended to extra innings. Fifteen Blugold wins came by shutout.

Besides the winning percentage record, the Blugolds broke the school standard for fielding percentage in a season at .963 to break the record of .960 set in 2001. They also blasted 34 home runs to better the mark of 28 set last year and against Platteville this season, they broke the school and conference record for home runs in a single game with seven. The Blugold pitching staff also established a school record for strikeouts in a season with 258 to exceed the standard of 240 set in 1999.

Four individuals added their names to the Blugold record book. They included junior pitcher **Mallory McKinney** (*Brooklyn Park, MN/Champlin Park*), sophomore shortstop **Casey Leisgang** (*Seymour*), sophomore first baseman **Jill Janke** (*Black River Falls*) and freshman pitcher **Bri Sturm** (*Zumbrota, MN*). McKinney added her name in six categories including strikeouts in a season (183), strikeouts in a career (408), wins in a season (26), complete games in a season (24), shutouts in a season (13) and earned run average in a season (0.72). At one point during the season, she pitched 61 consecutive scoreless innings. Opponents batted just .171 against McKinney who earned AFCA All-American Second Team honors for the second time in her career. She was also named the Co-Pitcher of the Year in the WIAC, the second time she has earned that award.

Leisgang bettered Jill Schoenike's single season home run mark of 10 when she rapped 11 round-trippers including five leading off the Blugold first. At the halfway point of her career, Leisgang now has 19 dingers, just two shy of Schoenike's career mark of 21.

Janke got into the record book "taking one for the team" as she was hit by a pitch six times, to top