

Douglas  
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PREP NOTES

## WVC softball looking like two-team race

**I**t's very early in the high school softball season, but the Watauga Valley Conference race looks like a two-horse chase.

Unaka and University High are expected to be at the head of the pack, with the Lady Rangers taking the role of favorite. Hampton, Cloudland and North Greene will likely be in a battle for the No. 3 spot in the league.

The Rangers made it to Murfreesboro last year, and may have a shot at threatening that journey again.

"I expect us to have a chance," said Lady Rangers' head coach Ronnie Hicks. "I think we're better than the last three or four years because we have a pretty good athlete at every position. And we have a lot more speed-wise than we've had in a while."

Leading the way for Unaka are senior pitchers Jamie Andrews and Lacey Huskins. They form a tough one-two punch in the circle, and senior catcher Katherine McInturff makes it a dynamic trio.

Huskins has signed with Milligan College and McInturff made it official with Chattanooga State.

Two other seniors play key roles: second baseman Cheslie Cox and outfielder Raven Wilson.

"Cox is the best slap hitter we've ever had," said Hicks, whose team is 7-3 overall and 1-0 in league play.

Three sophomores are in the mix with first baseman Leslie Colbaugh leading the way. Cassie Winters (3b) and Brittany Lawson (of) are also factors along with freshman Brandy Ensor, who has three home runs on the season.

So Unaka is very strong, but University High isn't backing down. Head coach Leslie McCallister said the Lady Junior Bucs are going to have their say with the Rangers.

"I fully anticipate us to challenge Unaka for the conference title," said McCallister. "This is the best hitting team I've had in my four seasons here."

And UH is well-stocked in the circle with sophomore Haley Faulkner leading the way. The sophomore is the centerpiece to the Junior Bucs' puzzle.

"She's definitely an integral part of the team," said McCallister. "She's backed up by a young team, but it's an experienced team. The majority of the girls have played travel ball."

Top hitters for UH include juniors Mikki Burke (rf), Sarah Mast (ss) and Aiyssa Fair (2b) along with Faulkner.

"We've got two people slapping, so we can manufacture runs," said McCallister. "And we also have some power to drive people in."

Rounding out the starting lineup are Belle Bright (Fr., c), Molly Cohee (8th, 1b), Taylor Treadway (Fr., 3b), Megan Blair (So., lf) and junior center fielder Carolyn Knight.

McCallister said she expects to also get help from senior Bekah Leonard, sophomore Beth Morgan, freshman Sarah Higginbotham and eighth-grader Amy Burton.

UH opens conference play today at home against Cloudland.

■ **KNOX** Farragut baseball pitcher Philip Pfeifer set a state record for career victories Friday.

The left-handed senior earned the win in a 2-0 decision over Columbia Central during the Kessler Invitational in Murfreesboro.

That gave Pfeifer a career mark of 43-3, breaking the record set by Oakdale's Brad Howard, who racked up 42 victories from 1992-96.

Among Howard's victims was University High in the postseason.

■ **Signings update:** Elizabethton's Inez Jarread