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'Cat Tracks: "Comeback 'Cats" Fight Back to Win the Title

Linfield Magazine Staff

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'Comeback 'Cats' fight back to win the title



Courage, determination and grit led the Wildcat softball team to its first national championship – and the first-ever women's team title in Linfield's history.

Dubbed the "Comeback 'Cats" for fighting their way back from elimination seven times, the Wildcats captured their fourth consecutive Northwest Conference title and the NCAA Division III Western Region title on their way to the championship.

The Wildcats, who finished fourth in the nation last year, started the championship series by winning two lopsided victories before Washington-St. Louis knocked them into the elimination round with a 6-3 win. But the Wildcats were not to be denied. They pounded out 22 hits during a wild 22-10 victory over Wisconsin-Eau Claire before snapping Washington-St. Louis' 25-game winning streak, with a 1-0 squeaker in eight innings, setting up a re-match with the Bears for the title.

There was no doubt that the Wildcats were ready to win. They hit four home runs – two by Amanda Attleberger '08 and one each by Meredith Brunette '08 and Lisa Smith '07 – to win 10-2 in six innings.

It was a record-breaking year for the 'Cats, who went 45-7 on the season, setting school records for home runs (50), team field average (.975) and runs per game (7.75). Seven players hit over .400 on the season and the team was number one in the nation in team batting average with .388. They outscored their opponents 99-33 in the playoffs and 56-18 in the championship tournament and faced three All-American pitchers, scoring 30 runs off them.

The win was especially sweet for Smith, who broke her arm in two places during the seventh game of the season. Five weeks later, Smith was back in action. She, along with catcher Jena Loop '07,

were the only seniors on the team.

Five players were named to the All-Tournament team (Brunette, Loop, Attleberger, Stephanie Rice '08 and Brittany Miller '10), six were named to the All-West Regional squad and nine were named to the Northwest Conference all-star team. Jenny Marshall '08 and Rice were named to the Louisville Slugger/National Fastpitch Coaches Association All-America Team.

Between the regionals and nationals the Wildcats spent 15 days on the road, traveling 7,000 miles, from McMinnville to Pineville, La., to Salem, Va. Returning via charter flight after their championship victory, the team touched down in Springfield, Mo., Cheyenne, Wyo., and Salt Lake City, Utah, before finally arriving in McMinnville at 2:30 a.m. on May 23.

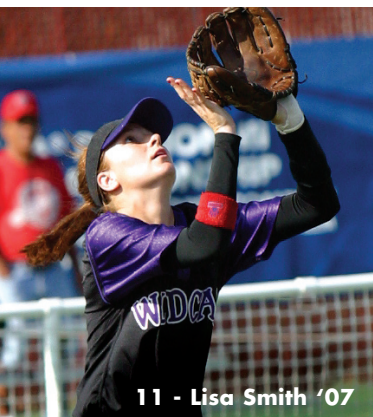
They visited the Virginia Tech campus in Blacksburg to pay tribute at a memorial to the recent shooting victims and spent time with patients at a Veterans Administration Hospital.

In McMinnville they were honored at a community celebration, which included a city proclamation of May 25 as "Wildcat National Softball Championship Day."

"I am very proud of our team and the way they battled throughout the playoffs," Head Coach Jackson Vaughan '97 said. "We were in a number of tough games against highly ranked opponents, but each time our team was able to rise to the occasion and play their best softball when it was needed. This is the mark of a true championship team."

For complete coverage of the women's softball season and all other sports information, go to:

www.linfield.edu/sports/



11 - Lisa Smith '07



3 - Stephanie Rice '08



4 - Jenny Marshall '08



3 - Jena Loop '07

