

# Softball Magazine's DII 2011 Preseason Top Ten: UP-AND-COMERS

## MAKING THEIR MARK AT THE D-II LEVEL

By Bill Ballew

The growing excitement generated at the Division I level of women's fast-pitch softball has spilled over into the D II ranks. Programs across the country, many of which are just beginning to establish themselves on

the national stage, are having success at the regional level and starting to challenge the perennial contenders for supremacy. Last year's finalists—Valdosta State and Hawaii Pacific—should be strong yet again this spring, yet with several squads having to reload due to graduation, the opportunity exists for a handful of new kids on the block to make their presence felt and possibly advance to the World Series in St. Joseph, Mo., in May.



*Morgan Johnson*

### 1. VALDOSTA STATE:

Head coach Thomas Macera led the Lady Blazers to a 51-9 record in 2010. Prior to reaching the national championship game and dropping an exciting contest to Hawaii Pacific, VSU was ranked in the top five of the country for most of the season and won the Gulf South Conference title. The Lady Blazers then won both the regional and super regional by coming out of the loser's bracket before winning their first three games in the national tournament. Alyssa Shirey, who led the team in the triple crown categories by hitting .432-20-61, earned All-America honors and was named the GSC East Player of the Year.

Valdosta State loses only two seniors from its 2010 team, although replacing Shirey will not be an easy feat. The team's top returning hitter is junior infielder Marti Littlefield, who provided a remarkable one-two punch with Shirey by hitting .346 with 17 home runs and 51 RBI. Outfielder Morgan Johnson, the reigning GSC Freshman of the Year, is back following her stellar first-season showing that included a .344 batting average with seven homers and 22 RBI. Senior outfielder Melessa Jackson and junior infielder April Hutchens also are back from last year's starting lineup. The Lady Blazers have their entire pitching staff intact, led by seniors Margaret Carter and Holly Satterfield, who was named the GSC East Pitcher of the Year in 2010. Carter had an impressive 1.16 ERA and a 24-5 record in 36 games, including 25 starts, while Satterfield posted a 1.45 ERA with a 27-4 record in 34 starts and 37 outings overall in the circle.

### 2. LENOIR-RHYNE:

Few programs have made more impressive strides in recent seasons than the Bears. In 2010, Lenoir-Rhyne advanced to the Southeast Super Regional and concluded the campaign with a school record for victories by going 53-9 while winning the South Atlantic Conference regular season and tournament titles. Nine of head coach Shena Hollar's top 11 hitters and two of its top three pitchers are back on campus, led by senior shortstop Kat Rivers, the 2010 Southeast Region Player of the Year.

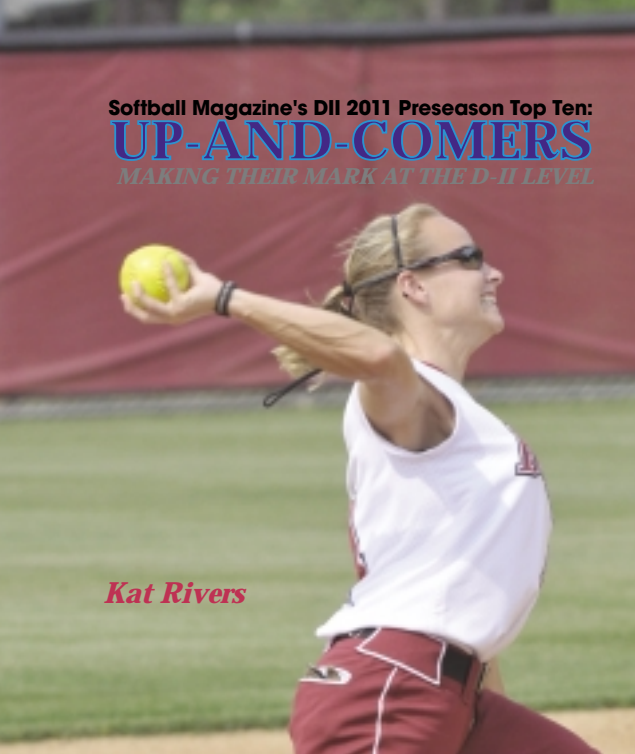
Rivers, who also was tabbed



*Carlee Carpenter*



*Marti Littlefield*



**Kat Rivers**

the SAC Player of the Year, led the Bears with a .437 batting average while establishing the school mark for runs (65), hits (90), home runs (23), RBI (64) and total bases (179). She also tied for the national lead in round-trippers at the D-II level. Rivers forms a talented double-play tandem with junior second baseman Carlee Carpenter, who hit .384 with 13 homers and 44 RBI. Junior catcher Sarah Atkins ranked third on the team with a .355 norm to go with 14 home runs and 63 RBI and earned SAC tournament MVP honors. Senior outfielder Heather Brock, juniors Tameron Sealey, Brittany Davidson and Brandi Haitcock and sophomores Jessica Fellmeth and Megan Laxton are expected to be solid contributors again this spring. Junior pitcher Dawon Millwood went 21-4 in the circle with a 1.97 ERA and 197 strikeouts to improve to 39-8 over the past two years. Millwood was joined in the rotation by sophomore Alex Smith, who led the conference in wins with a 25-5 mark while posting a 2.05 ERA.

### 3. MIDWESTERN STATE:

The Mustangs had the best campaign in program history last year by posting a single-season record 54 victories, including a 17-game winning streak. Head coach Brady Tigert welcomes back most of the 2010 Mustangs with the exception of



**Elena Bennett**

All-America pitcher Katie Petersen, who went 25-5 with a 1.25 ERA, and Lauren Craig, who concluded her collegiate career by hitting .348 with a team-best 49 RBI. In their place Midwestern State will feature outstanding athleticism and a tremendous drive in hopes of advancing farther than the South Central Super Regional in 2011.

Leading the stampede will be the Mustangs' top two hitters from a year ago in sophomore outfielders Elena Bennett and Courtney Bingham. Bennett makes things happen at the top of the lineup, including in a team-best .366 average and 25 stolen bases. Bingham contributed a .364 norm at the plate with 29 RBI and a perfect 10-for-10 in steal attempts. Junior third baseman Mallory Mooney is the Mustangs' top returning run producer after hitting .343 with seven home runs and 40 RBI. Power also comes from senior McKenzie Sickler (.303) and sophomore shortstop Natalie Rodriguez (.302), with both infielders hitting nine round-trippers apiece. Outfielders Nicki Duff (.331) and Alyson Reynolds (.327) are consistent performers that give the team solid depth in the lineup. A pair of seniors will try to overcome the loss of Petersen in the circle. Brittney Tanner had an outstanding junior campaign while going 22-3 with a 1.58 ERA. Kristina Gutierrez made 12 starts a year ago among her 18 appearances and posted a 7-2 record with a 3.16 ERA.

### 4. HAWAII PACIFIC:



**McKenzie Sickler**

After finishing the regular season as the West Region's top-ranked team, the Sea Warriors hosted and won both the Regional and Super Regional before going 4-0 in the national championships, which included a come-from-behind triumph over Valdosta State in the finale to win the school's first D-II World Series. Despite losing World Series MVP and perennial All-American Sherise Musquiz, head coach Bryan Nakasone returns seven of his top nine hitters from a year ago in hopes of putting together another run at the big prize.

Senior Ashley Valine will attempt to fill the void created by Musquiz's departure. Valine had an impressive 2010 showing, going 15-5 with a 1.28 ERA in 21 starts and 24 overall appearances. Junior Breanne Patton pitched well in limited opportunities with a 1-0 record and a 0.91 ERA in four outings in the circle. Newcomer Melissa Kirby, a junior from Manassas, Va.,

could receive some innings as well. The Sea Warriors return their leading hitter in sophomore Nicole Morrow, who batted .355 with 28 RBI. Junior Maile Kim is the team's top power producer after hitting .353 with nine homers and 57 RBI last season. Senior Kozy Toriano, a .305 hitter in 2010, is the team's top baserunner after stealing 13 bags in 14 tries. Sophomores Caira Pires (.289), Chante Tesoro (.275) and Celina Garces (.265) should play larger roles this year after strong campaigns as freshmen.

### 5. NORTH GEORGIA:

The Saints had one of the most remarkable seasons in D-II history last year when they reeled off 51 straight victories, the second-longest string in NCAA softball annals. Head coach Mike Davenport's team was ranked atop every regular-season poll and finished fifth after dropping a pair of games in the World Series to finish 51-2. Having won back-to-back Peach Belt Conference titles and sweeping both the Southeast Regional and Super Regional in each of the past two seasons, North Georgia must replace four of nine starters but has both of its starting pitchers ready to go this spring.

The Saints, who have gone 101-7 over the past two seasons, are led by sophomore catcher/first baseman Katherine Martin, who tops the returners with a .375 batting average, 51 hits and 12 doubles. Junior catcher/third baseman Hilary Cox had six home runs and 29 RBI a year ago, while junior outfielder Pilar Harden,

the top returning base stealer with six, batted at a .313 clip with five homers and 27 RBI. The Saints are also counting on senior infielder Kasey Knight, who batted .296 last year, and sophomore Callie Fernandez, who could see more activity after hitting .344 in 32 games as a freshman. North Georgia should be in good shape in the circle with the return of senior Sarah Phillips, who won 44 games and saved three others while posting 294 strikeouts in 300 innings and registering an ERA of 1.00. Also returning is senior Krysten Connelly, a sophomore who went 5-0 with a 1.85 ERA in three starts and 10 appearances.

### 6. MOLLOY:

The Lions are another up-and-coming team that is riding the momentum of their best season in program history. In 2010, Molloy College went 43-21 and won its first-ever East Region crown and advanced to the World Series for the first time before falling in its finale during a nine-inning contest to Bloomsburg. In her sixth season as the head coach of her alma mater, Susan Cassidy-Lyke returns most of last year's young team in hopes of making further inroads on the national championship in 2011.

Helping the Lions roar will be the return of its starting rotation. Sophomore Megan Butterworth had an outstanding freshman campaign in which she went 17-6 with a 2.14 ERA in 36 games and 31 starts. Another second-year pitcher, Kelley Jansen, paced the team in wins and appearances with 42 last year while going 22-11 with a



*Hilary Cox*



*Megan Butterworth*



*Katherine Martin*



*Haley Calderwood*

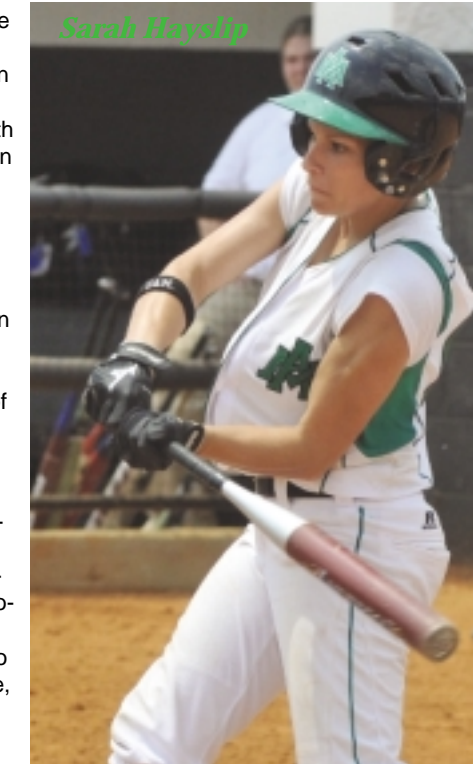
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2.23 ERA. Junior lefthander Allison Ryan could see more time in the circle this season after going 3-1 with a 4.35 ERA in 15 appearances, all but three in relief. Offensively, the Lions are led by sophomore third baseman Haley Calderwood, who hit .393 with 10 home runs and 56 RBI, and junior first baseman Carla Campagna, a .365 hitter a year ago with a team-best 15 round-trippers and 63 RBI. Sophomore outfielder Jeana Frey does an excellent job of putting the ball in play and running the bags, as evidenced by her team-best .400 batting average, 37 runs and nine stolen bases. In addition to pitching, Butterworth can produce at the plate, with the left-handed hitter batting at a .335 clip. Senior second baseman Alexandra Sydor is one of the veteran leaders on the club who batted .278 with 28 runs and 22 RBI in 2010.

**7. ARKANSAS-MONTICELLO:**

The 2010 campaign brought about a pair of victories for the Cotton Blossoms. On the field, head coach Alvy Early's team entered the national rankings for the first time in the program's 15-year history and finished the season with a 48-9 record that included winning the South Region before losing to Valdosta State in the Super Regional. What's more, the Arkansas-Monticello softball squad had the highest grade-point average among all teams at four-year colleges in the NCAA.

Last year's performance, which included a 25-5 record in the GSC, has the Cotton Blossoms prepared to contend for the D-II national championship. Arkansas-Monticello has its entire pitching staff back and eight of its 11 players that saw significant starting activity in 2010. Junior infielder Sarah Hayslip is the leading hitter after posting a .387 batting average with a team-high 17 home runs to go with 65 RBI. Senior catcher Kendra White, a .336 hitter with 35 RBI, and senior infielder Jennifer Hickman, a .333 hitter with 37 ribbies, are the veterans, while junior outfielder Katie Bowman and junior infielder Meagan Wilson are coming off campaigns in which they hit at a .301 and .280 clip, respectively. The Cotton Blossoms tend to get outstanding offense



*Sarah Hayslip*



*Kayla Jackson*



*Lacy Mauro*

from their pitchers. Junior Kayla Jackson is the leader in the circle after going 31-7 with a 1.31 ERA in 38 starts, but also hit .363 with 10 home runs and 50 RBI. Sophomore Faith Lund, who had a 1.70 ERA in seven relief appearances, contributed a .307 norm with 14 home runs and 44 RBI at the plate. Junior Randa Perry hit .306 and posted a 1.81 ERA with a 3-3 record, while junior Amanda Nordberg focused most of her efforts on hurling by going 19-3 with a 2.42 ERA.

**8. BLOOMSBURG:**

A new era has dawned in Bloomsburg. Long-time head coach Jan Hutchinson retired after the 2010 season, when the Huskies reached the 50-win plateau for the third time in school history and advanced to the national championships before being ousted by Angelo State. Replacing Hutchinson will be Susan Kocher, who spent 23 seasons as an assistant under Hutchinson and has played a significant role in the program making 28 straight NCAA tournament appearances, including advancing to the championship round on 11 occasions.

Kocher has plenty of returning talent to work with, beginning with both of last year's pitchers. Senior Shavaun Fisher carried the



*Danielle Lazorka*

Huskies at times last year while going 35-7 with a 1.20 ERA and 36 complete games. Fisher is joined in the circle by sophomore Cait Paine, who put together an impressive collegiate debut by posting a 15-1 record with a 3.02 ERA in 22 games and 19 starts. Seven of the team's top 11 offensive players from a year ago are back, led by senior Lacy Mauro, who batted at a .385 clip and led the Huskies last season with 46 RBI. Senior infielder Danielle Lazorka gives Bloomsburg consistent production after hitting .380 last year, while junior Sam Pientack provides much of the team's power after pacing the Huskies with 10 home runs and adding 44 RBI with a .357 average. Other returning starters include senior outfielders Emily Young (.323) and Lori Neyhard (.256), senior third baseman Jenna Hampton (.312) and junior infielder Mandy Leach (.262).

## 9. WAYNE STATE:

The Warriors led the nation with a staff ERA of 1.12 last year despite tying for second in most games played with 65. Head coach Gary Bryce faces the difficult task of replacing Casey Hanes, who topped the country with a 0.58 ERA, along with three other players from the 2010 squad that set the school record for wins in a season with 52 and became the first class in Wayne State history to post three 40-win campaigns.

Leading the charge in the balanced Warriors' lineup will be junior outfielder Alison Allen, who tied for third in the nation with 90 hits while batting at a .402 clip. Junior infielder Becca Ryan and Rebecca Stanley, the third baseman, were among the toughest players in the nation to strike out while hitting .355 and .313, respectively. Sophomore catcher/first baseman Brittany Omelanchuk (.321), senior catcher Rachel Spaccarotelli (.312), sophomore outfielder Steph Foreman (.266 and a team-high 36 RBI) and junior second baseman/outfielder Lauren Histed (.256) give Wayne State a batting order capable of scoring runs at any time. The success of the team's 2011 season will center on pitching, with junior Sam Cain (3-3, 3.00) the lone returner in the circle. Bryce will be leaning on freshmen Ali Herbert and Lauren McLaughlin to provide significant innings over the course of the campaign.

## 10. METRO STATE:

The Roadrunners are in a transition phase after head coach Jen Fisher resigned to take the same position at Colorado State. Fisher reestablished the Metro State program three years ago after it was disbanded following the 1990 season. During that three-year stint, Fisher guided the Roadrunners to two NCAA tournament appearances, including a trip to the World Series in 2010, along with a pair of Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference regular-season and tournament crowns. Vanessa Becerra, an assistant under Fisher, was named interim head coach and will have to replace the team's top pitcher in Christie Robinson and four starters in her first year at the dugout helm.

Metro State should be in good shape in the circle with the return of senior Julia Diehl and junior Brittany Moss. Diehl started 11 games and went 12-1 with a 2.38 ERA, while Moss made 14 starts and posted an 11-1 mark with a 2.73 ERA. The Roadrunners also have their leading hitter, senior shortstop Amber Roundtree, who registered a .418 batting average to go with nine home runs, 38 RBI and 15 stolen bases, which tied for first on the team. Senior left fielder Jennessa Tescone will provide power once again after hitting .358 with 19 home runs and 62 RBI in 2010. Junior Molly Clark also has some pop, as evidenced by her .323 norm with 10 homers and 27 RBI. Diehl could hit more often after clubbing seven home runs in 64 at-bats last year, while sophomore Amber Maul, another option in the circle, hit .311 with 28 RBI during her college debut.



*Brittany Moss*



*Jennessa Tescone*



*Alison Allen*



*Rebecca Stanley*