

## SWM special report by Lisa Knight

**This season, SWM picked the top 10 schools in the nation that we think will go for the gold or at least the gold trophy at the Women's College World Series. Picking this year's best was a bit tougher because softball is in full-swing and universities have been jumping all over the polls; and with the universities who have lost great players this year such as Monica Abbott and Cat Osterman – competition is fierce.**

### 1 The Sun Devils (Arizona State)

Softball West Magazine is pleased to announce a west coast school as our number one pick. We aren't playing favorites here, it just happens that with a 41-2 record (as of press time), this year's WCWS needs to look out for Arizona State. The Devils returned eight players this year and only lost one. Clint Myers is in his third year as Head Coach with Robert Wagner and Kirsten Voak to back him up. Myers has an impressive 107-32 record with the Devils so far, and will push players Katie Burkhart and Rhiannon Baca to get their team to the WCWS. Burkhart is a senior pitcher for Arizona State, and is by far the best the university has seen. She holds almost every pitching record for the Devils, including her career strikeout record of 1,157. It should be noted that only 30 pitchers have entered the 1,000 career strikeout list in NCAA history. Burkhart's career highlight moment thus far would be Arizona State's first perfect game against Notre Dame last year 3-0. Burkhart finished the 2007 season with 1.11 ERA, 35 wins and 517 strikeouts. Baca is also a senior and plays shortstop. Like teammate Burkhart, Baca also has an astounding résumé. Baca ended the 2007 season with an incredible .920 fielding percentage, 87 putouts and 73 assists. (Hence the reason Arizona State is number one). She also had a .259 batting average, which was an increase from the 2006 season; and she hit eight homers, making that a career total of 15.

### 2 The Gators (Florida)

Watch out for the Gators because almost half of their team is new this year, and Florida looks vicious. Last season the Gators went 50-22 and are already 43-2 (as of press time) this year. Head Coach, Tim Walton, is in his third year with the Gators and made some remarkable recruiting decisions. With the help of Jennifer Rocha and Jenny Gladding as assistant coaches, the Gators have quite a chance this year to show softball fans how the game is played. Teammates, Stacey Nelson and Mary Ratliff, are two notable players out on the field for the 2008 season. Nelson is in her third year pitching for Florida. In 2007, she finished with a 34-14 record and pitched 29 consecutive shutout innings in one week. She only gave up four homers in 318 innings – the reason behind her 42 starts (double from her freshman year). Ratliff is a senior outfielder. She



UCLA's Anjelica Selden. Don Liebig/ASUCLA Photography

having posted her seventh-straight, 20-win season and two 40-win seasons, as well as receiving her 600<sup>th</sup> career victory three years ago when Texas held a 47-10 record. Assistant Coaches, Joy Jackson and Mary Jo Firnback will no doubt help Evans improve her 679-419-2 record this year, especially with players like Megan Gibson and Holly Ridley. Gibson is in her senior year as pitcher. Last year she was one of only five teammates to start in all 60 games, where she pitched nearly half of them. Gibson ended the 2007 season with a 17-4 record and 1.54 ERA. She had 14 complete games with eight shutouts, as well as a tremendous number of strikeouts (157) for the season. Its no doubt, she'll have a chance to send her team to the WCWS once again this year. Ridley is a junior shortstop, and is making an outstanding comeback this year due to surgery last season. Still, in 2007 Ridley played in 21 games and was 3-4 as a pinch-hitter and batted a .333. In 2006, Ridley started in all 53 games as shortstop and had seven multi-hit games. She'll be a key player for the Aggies if they make it to the WCWS.

### 6 The Cardinals (Stanford)

With a record of 465-232-3, Head Coach, John Rittman doesn't get enough attention. He is in his 12<sup>th</sup> year coaching the Cardinals, with the help of assistant coaches, Trisha Ford and Jessica Allister. Last year, Stanford finished the 2007 season with a 35-21-1 record. This year, the Cardinals only lost two players, and have seven returning. Tricia Aggabao is one of the Cardinals exceptional ones. Aggabao is a senior, playing infield. In 2007, she started all 57 games and had a batting average of .313 with 21 runs. Her sophomore year, Aggabao played in 49 games, starting in all but five, where she had an average of .317. Teammate Becky McCullough is a senior pitcher for the Cardinals. This year she is helping Stanford with its 34-7 record (as of press time), after her own terrific comeback. With a recent arm surgery, McCullough made 24 appearances in the circle last season and had 10 wins. During that time, she struck out 74 batters in 118.1 innings. During the 2006 season, McCullough started in all but three games she played in. She finished with a 10-6 record, in which she struck out 73 batters.

### 7 The Wolverines (Michigan)

Team captain, Samantha Findlay is a senior first baseman. In the 2007 season, Findlay led the team with a stellar 11 homers, 40 walks and nine stolen bases. She also led the team in 2006 with 36 walks, and a .462 on-base percentage and was second on the team with a .319 batting average. Another notable teammate for

Michelle Palavuelos, also had an amazing season. Palavuelos started in nearly every game she played and had a .209 batting average, with three homers and 10 RBI.

### 9 The Lady Volunteers (Tennessee)

The Vols are having a rough season without their favorite pitcher (Monica Abbott), but they still make SWM's cut. Head Coaches, Ralph and Karen Weekly are in their sixth year and helping players Tonya Callahan and Caitlin Ryan push their team through the tough 2008 season. The Weekly's have a 263-93-1 record and are assisted by Marty McDaniel. With a 36-7 record (as of press time), these coaches should be able to improve it before the season is over. So should Callahan. Callahan is a senior infielder who hit .385 last season with 16 doubles, one triple, 11 homers and an incredible 60 RBI. She leads the Vols with career homers (35). Caitlin Ryan is also a senior and was the primary pinch-runner last year. With her experience in the WCWS, she just might help push the Vols to get there once more.

### 10 The Wildcats (Arizona)

Being at number 10 on the SWM list and ranked at seven on the USA Today Poll (as of press time), the Wildcats have a chance of attending the WCWS for the third consecutive year. Many might blame Arizona's 27-10 record (as of press time) on Head Coach Mike Candrea's leave of absence (the Olympics is a good excuse though), but Candrea is supposed to be in Tucson for 17 of Arizona's games. Assistant Coach Larry Ray has plenty of experience though. In his 17<sup>th</sup> year with the Wildcats, Ray assumed the role of Head Coach four years ago and had an extraordinary 55-6 record. First baseman Junior Sam Banister will also be an asset to the Wildcats this year. Banister started in 53 games last season and came out with a .316 average. She entered the WCWS with a career-best six-game hitting streak. She also attended the WCWS her freshman year – so not to worry – the Wildcats may impress more than we think.



Stanford's Alissa Haber. Blake Parkinson/Stanford Athletics.

# 10

## Softball West Magazine's Collegiate top

played in 61 games with 54 starts in the 2007 season. Last year she doubled all of her stats from her previous two seasons, including a .294 batting average. She was also one of only two players on the team to have a perfect fielding percentage. It's a player like Ratliff in the outfield that uphold Florida's name.

### 3 The Bruins (UCLA)

Of course, the Bruins made our list – their softball skills are to be expected. Once again, Anjelica Selden, "Jelly," is one of the most talked about pitchers. Jelly is a senior this year for UCLA. Last season she became the university's all-time strikeout leader with 1,096, and led her team to a 17-11 record. She finished with an incredible 20 complete games and seven shutouts. Jelly is already entering this season with 1,106 strikeouts (as of press time), and along with teammate, Megan Langenfield, will take her team through to the end. Langenfield is a sophomore for UCLA and plays first base and pitcher. In June 2007, Langenfield was on the International Softball Federation's Junior Women's World Championship team. For UCLA, she was one of only five players to start in all 56 games, starting 35 of them at first base and 19 in the circle. In 2007, Langenfield hit .315 with seven homers and 41 RBI. As a pitcher she had 93 strikeouts in nearly 131 innings. It would be an understatement to say Head Coach, Kelly Inouye-Perez did a job well-done in her first year with the Bruins last season. Inouye-Perez finished with a 37-18 record, third in the PAC-10. The Bruins also ended the season ranked no. 18 by USA Today.

### 4 The Crimson Tide (Alabama)

Currently ranked at third in the USA Today poll (as of press time), and ranked nine at the end of the season last year, Alabama is a favorite to go all the way this year. Head Coach, Patrick Murphey, is in his 10<sup>th</sup> year with Alabama and has an impressive record of 467-149. Assistant coaches, Alyson Habetz and Vann Stuedeman will help key players like Katie Johnson and Jordan Praytor turn 2008 into an impressive season. Johnson is a senior for the Tide as a catcher. Last season she played in 58 games with 23 starts. Her sophomore year she batted .304 with one triple and six RBI. Praytor, a senior, is a utility player. From Vancouver, WA, Praytor received several awards last season for her softball skills. Last year, she led the Tide with 37 walks, 66 hits and four triples. She was second on the team in stolen bases (35) and most steal-attempts (41) and she had 16 multi-hit games. Her 2006 season wasn't any less impressive as she played in 65 games, starting in 63 of them. She also ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> nationally with the best batting average. With a utility player like Praytor, Alabama will go far.

### 5 The Aggies (Texas A&M)

Though they lost a key player in Cat Osterman, who has moved on to bigger and better things (the Olympics is about as big as it gets), Texas is still on our list. With Head Coach, Jo Evans in her 11<sup>th</sup> year, SWM has faith the Aggies will increase their final stats from last year (46-14). Evans has quite the résumé of experience, including

the Wolverines is Michelle Weatherdon. This senior outfielder was the primary pinch-runner for the Wolverines last year. She had a career high 10 runs and two RBI. (So far this season her average is .667 – as of press time). In 24 years Carol Hutchins has improved Michigan softball tremendously. Just last season, Hutchins became the seventh coach in NCAA history to reach 1,000 career wins. She has also led the Wolverines to the WCWS in the last eight of 13 seasons. Her assistant coaches this year are Bonnie Tholl and Jennifer Brundage.

### 8 The Bulldogs (Fresno)

Head Coach, Margie Wright, is another long-time, distinguished coach. In her 23<sup>rd</sup> year with the Bulldogs, Wright has a 1,091-354-1 record. With assistants, Marcie Green-Jones and Jan Winslow, Wright led Fresno to a 47-18 record last season, finishing second in the WAC and 25<sup>th</sup> in the USA Today poll. Fresno has 13 returning players, and infielder, Jenna Cervantez, is one of them. Cervantez is in her final season with the Bulldogs. Last season, she started in all 65 games, and finished it off with a .602 slugging percentage, 12 homers, 12 doubles, one triple and 37 RBI. Senior outfielder,