

2010 COLLEGIATE FASTPITCH REPORT

Top 10 in 2010 - Breaking down the College World Series contenders

By Don Cameron

Washington (33-3, No. 1)

The defending national champs solidified their hold on the No. 1 spot in our ranking with convincing weekends against the UCLA Bruins and Arizona Wildcats. After taking two

of three from the Bruins to kick off April, the Huskies dominated No. 2 Arizona, winning 2-1, 7-0 and 9-3.

With sold-out crowds roaring at Husky Softball Stadium, Washington improved to 33-3, 5-1 in the Pac-10, winning the season series against both UCLA and Arizona for the first time since 2000.

The Huskies boast two finalists for the 2010

USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year.

Last year's top player, Danielle Lawrie, might be the best two-way player in the game. She leads the nation in shutouts and ranks second in wins and walks per seven innings. She also leads her team with 11 home runs and

40 RBI.

The other Huskies finalist, junior Jenn Salling, ranks eighth nationally in runs scored and has solidified the shortstop defense in her first full season for the program.

As a team, Washington ranks ninth nationally in fielding percentage and 11th in scoring average, with 6.64 runs per game.

Michigan (30-5, No. 2)

The Wolverines head down the April stretch with a nine-game winning streak, having lost to just one unranked opponent all season. An April 10-11 sweep at Minnesota boosted Carol Huchins' squad to 30-5 overall, 7-0 in the Big 10, with six run-rule decisions in the team's past eight games.

Junior hurler Jordan Taylor is one of 10 pitchers to make the top-25 cut for national player of the year. Her numbers are impressive — 14-2 record, 1.17 earned-run average, 173 strikeouts and four complete-game shutouts. Her potential is clear. On March 18, she limited the best bats in the nation — the Arizona Wildcats — to one hit in a thrilling 1-0 extra-inning win.

Michigan ranks 10th nationally in ERA, with Nikki Nemetz forming a potent 1-2 punch with Taylor. Nemetz has chipped in with a 12-3 record and 1.85 ERA and some solid plate appearances, with 22 RBI and a .319 average.

Maggie Vieffhaus, Bree

Evans and Dorian Shaw pace the offense, each hitting above .360 for an attack that ranks 15th in scoring.

Florida (30-4, No. 3)

Last year's NCAA runner-up, Florida is playing its best ball of the season at the right time. The Gators took two of three from No. 7 Alabama then swept LSU and Arkansas to run their winning streak to nine. Florida's potent lineup took charge in a 6-1 whipping of Arkansas on April 11, as the Gators blasted four home runs in the sixth inning.

With national ERA leader Stacey Nelson lost to graduation, the Gators have relied on the top slugging attack in the country to sprint to a 30-4 record. Francesca Enea bats .394 with 15 homers and 48 RBI. Michelle Moultrie (.394), Megan Bush (.341), Aja Paculba (.330) and Brittany Schutte (.330) energize the offense.

Stephanie Brombacher is the new ace, compiling a 20-4 mark with a 2.24 ERA, with freshman Ensley Gammel 9-0 with a 2.09 ERA.

Florida is seeking the school's — and the Southeastern Conference — first NCAA title. The Pac-10 has won 21 of the 27 Women's College World Series titles, with Arizona State and Washington joining powerhouses UCLA (11 championships) and Arizona (eight) the past two years.

"We had a couple of freshman play out of their minds this week," head coach Tim Walton said after the LSU sweep. "Brittany Schutte and Ensley Gammel really stepped up and were as advertised from the recruiting scene."

Corrie Brooks belted two roundtrippers in a scintillating 11-9 win against Alabama, and Walton liked the swagger his team emerged with. "I thought we were at the World Series, that's how it looked

like to me, to see how excited they were," Walton said of that win. "... It was a lot of fun to see them truly appreciate how hard we work. I don't know how hard other teams work, but I can guarantee there aren't many teams that work as hard as we do in a practice setting."

Arizona (32-7, No. 4)

Arizona's counter to Danielle Lawrie is freshman ace Kenzie Fowler, the 2008 and 2009 Gatorade National Player of the Year in high school. The 5-foot-11 righty is seventh nationally in ERA, joining teammate

Brittany Lastrapes as a top 25 finalist for the collegiate player of the year.

Offensively, the Wildcats have no equal. Mike Candrea's ballclub leads the nation with 8.32 runs per game, with Brigette Del Ponte topping the nation in RBI per game. Two Wildcats — Lauren Schutzler (.451) and Lastrapes (.424) are above the .400

Softball West Magazine 2010 ranking

As of April 19, 2010

1. Washington
2. Michigan
3. Florida
4. Arizona
5. Georgia Tech
6. Arizona State
7. Alabama
8. UCLA
9. Oklahoma State
10. Stanford



Photo courtesy of Max Waugh

Shawna Wright
Washington



Photo courtesy of Tim Casey

Aja Paculba
Florida



Photo courtesy of Luke Adams

Brittany Lastrapes
Arizona