

sports



Broadside's Fan of the Week
Travis Johnson

What makes you Mason's biggest men's basketball fan?

"I stay with the team no matter what. I cheer as hard as I can, no matter the score. Not to mention the painful paint I wear to as many games as possible."

PHOTO BY | PETER FLINT



Junior forward Louis Birdsong goes for the shot in Mason's Homecoming game win at home versus Northeastern.

PHOTO BY TEDDY WEETER/AST PHOTOGRAPHY MANAGER

Home Domination

HOMECOMING, from Front

Notable stats in the game include the Patriots scoring 44 percent from the field, but only shooting 58 percent from the line. Vaughan led all scorers with 16, but had help from Monroe's 10 points. This was Long's second-ever double-double as he recorded 14 points and 10 rebounds. Vaughan scored only two points in the first half.

Additionally, the Patriots were sent to the line a total of 36 times. Defensively, the Patriots played amazingly,

holding Northeastern to just 34 percent shooting, 14 percent from 3-point range, and stealing the ball eight times. The Huskies shot only 27 percent in the first half.

After shooting just 34 percent in the first half, the Patriots made 55 percent of their shots in the last 20 minutes.

"I don't normally sweat much in a game, but I did today," said head coach Jim Larranaga. "For our student body, for our alumni, for fans, [and] friends of our George Mason family, this was a big day

... the place was rocking and I knew our guys would respond to that kind of energy [and] enthusiasm in the arena and we were just playing so darn hard."

Mason's 12th home win comes at a crucial time as they closed the gap for the CAA conference lead to one game. Later in the day, the Virginia Commonwealth University Rams fell to the Old Dominion University Monarchs 69-65. Both Northeastern and VCU hold an 11-4 conference record, but VCU has the best overall record at 18-8.

Even though Mason is just

one game behind Northeastern and VCU, other CAA teams are still contending for the top spot. As of Saturday evening, the Drexel University Dragons trailed closely at 9-5 in the conference and ODU improved to 9-6.

Mason looks to extend their 2009 home record to 13-0 on Wednesday as they take on Drexel. The Patriots will try to snap their five-game road losing streak in Omaha, Neb. for the BracketBuster match against the Creighton University Bluejays next Saturday.

Check out video highlights from the Homecoming game against Northeastern at connect2mason.com!

SPORTS IN A MINUTE

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

The women's basketball team could not build off their momentum from last Sunday's victory as they fell to the University of North Carolina-Wilmington Seahawks 69-40. Mason had only two players in double figures as they were led by junior guard Rashuana Hobbs with 14 points and five rebounds, and sophomore guard Brittany Eley with 10 points. Hobbs made four 3-pointers, but it was not enough as Mason fell behind early in the first half. Kristen Hanzer led UNC-W with 14 points. The Seahawks built a big lead early in the contest by jumping to a 14-5 lead. Mason cut the lead to eight in the first half, but it was the closest Mason had the entire game. Mason shot 27 percent from the field in the first half. Mason falls to 3-20 overall and 1-11 in conference play. The Seahawks, on the other hand, swept the Patriots to improve their record to 11-12 while going 5-7 in the CAA.

SOFTBALL

Freshman third baseman Tori Dudley had a strong debut as she went 2-for-4 while scoring three runs in Mason's season opening 7-1 win over the Western Carolina University Catamounts. After easily defeating the Catamounts in the first game, Mason fell to the Villanova University Wildcats 6-5 in the second game of a doubleheader at the University of Central Florida Early Bird Tournament in Orlando, Fla. In the first game, Mason was hot early, scoring four runs in the third inning after three Catamount errors. Junior ace pitcher Becky Anderson started off the season with a complete game. She allowed one run on five hits with five strikeouts.

In the second game, Mason scored early, tallying four runs in the first two innings alone. But Mason could manage only one run from there on as Villanova scored four more runs, including the two-out game-winning hit from right fielder Shannon O'Brien. Anderson and freshman shortstop Rachael Davies recorded two hits and two RBIs apiece, but the team struck out 13 times. Wildcats reliever Megan Hord, who earned the win, only allowed one hit in 3-2/3 innings while striking out eight Mason batters. Mason drops to 1-1 on the season.

Think You're a Sports Junkie? Prove it.
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Mason's Youth Group

Young, Talented Patriots Ready to Swing for the Fences in the 2009 Season

BRIAN CHAN

Sports Editor

One of the key additions to George Mason University softball will be their new state-of-the-art ballpark. With a change of scenery, the Patriots look to exceed expectations once again this season as they were picked to finish last in the conference in the preseason polls.

Mason softball was inceptioned in 1979 and at one time it was one of the school's strongest programs. In 2002, the Patriots reached the 40-win plateau for the third time in school history. Since then, the team has gone through a dry spell.

Mason entered the 2008 season having finished last in the Colonial Athletic Association for the previous two seasons. Since posting an 8-48 record in 2006, their worst win-loss ratio in school history, Mason has shown slight improvements with a 19-34 record in 2007 and 19-32 record last season.

Mason began the 2008 season with a 1-7 record. Five of their losses were by one run, including their season-opening loss to the nationally-ranked University of Michigan Wolverines. The Patriots responded by winning four of their next five games. During the middle of the season, Mason outscored the Coppin State University Eagles by a combined score of 54-1 in a doubleheader. Prior to losing their final six games, the Patriots won seven of eight.

Mason kicks off the 2009 season with fifth-year manager Joe Verbanic and only six returning players among their 15-man roster. Junior pitcher Becky Anderson returns as Mason's top pitcher after making a school-record 36 appearances. Anderson's 1.95 ERA ranked fourth among CAA pitchers with at least 100 innings. Despite recording the CAA-leading 17 losses last season, Anderson held a 2.34 strikeout-to-walk ratio and

gave up only three home runs.

"The main thing [for this season] is to work together. Getting to know each other and working as a team is important to us," said Anderson.

Anderson will go up against the conference's most prominent pitchers. Defending CAA champion Hofstra University Pride senior Kayleigh Lotti, the two-time CAA Pitcher of the Year, led the conference with a 23-6 record and 241 strikeouts in 196-2/3 innings. Opponents hit only .153 against her. The James Madison University Dukes led by their two seniors, Jenny Clohan and Meredith Felts combined for 27 wins and 291 strikeouts last season. The Pride and Dukes will be tough challenges for Anderson as she is the lone junior for Mason.

"I have learned to take my time and focus more than in the past. I was nervous during my freshman year, but I have now learned to slow the game down," said Anderson.

Senior outfielders Alison Bryan and Meghan Hill look to be influential leaders for a team that



Becky Anderson is Mason's leading pitcher this season.

PHOTO BY RANDY UNICK

lacks experience.

Bryan, who pitched earlier in her collegiate career, will split her time on the mound and in the outfield. She made 11 starts out of 20 appearances and posted a 3-8 record with six complete games in her freshman year before becoming a full-time outfielder.

Last season, she batted .195 after hitting .258 in 2007. Her two triples were tied for the team lead.

Hill, originally a walk-on, batted .172 and scored 14 runs last season, while hitting just singles. Her best performance came against Mount St. Mary's University when she recorded two hits and scored two runs.

Sophomores Stephanie Strother, Kate Bustin, and Kara Weiner are the other returning players.

The three combined for 49 at-bats last season. Bustin hit .300 and scored seven runs. In 14 at-bats, Weiner hit three doubles, drove in six RBIs, and scored nine runs.

One of the key losses is Ashli Breau, who led Mason in nearly every offensive category last season. While hitting .421/.463/.752, Breau belted a Mason record 11 home runs and drove in 48 RBIs. Throughout this season, Mason will search for its power-hitter.

The team this season will look to its young players for support. The Fairfax native catcher/infielder Morgan Davis, who received an All-Met Honorable Mention, broke the state record for RBIs in 2006. Utility player Alyssa See was named pitcher of the year by both the Ashland Times-Gazette and Mansfield News Journal. Among the eight freshmen, two come from out-of-state. Both pitcher/first baseman Miranda Cranford and infielder Tori Dudley arrive at Mason from the West Coast.

"We tend not to dwell on the past. This is one of the strongest freshman classes we have had. Being a young team is not a bad thing since we have great young talent that will compete with anybody and not back down. Our goal [for 2009] will be to go out there and try to win the conference," said Verbanic.

The Patriots will throw the first pitch in their new ballpark on Saturday against Youngstown State University to start off their 14-game homestand. Mason hosts two separate tournaments this season. They will wrap up the month of February with the Patriot Classic and host the George Mason Invitational in early March. Non-conference opponents for this season include games against University of Virginia and George Washington University. Mason concludes the regular season with a three-game series against the Dukes.