

Clark College team ready to play ball on own field

Penguins hope to play first home game in 19 years Saturday

By **PAUL DANZER**
Columbian staff writer

The schedule says the Clark College baseball team will play a couple of home games on Saturday.

The weather forecast says the Penguins might have to wait.

It's been 19 years since Clark fielded a baseball team, so a few more days might not seem like much. But after playing their first 16 games elsewhere, these baseball pioneers are looking forward to having a home-field advantage.

And that home field is a big part of the story of this season. Before they practiced on Thursday, the Penguins spent several hours working on the field on the west edge of campus.

It isn't quite ready for game time — if the Penguins do play Everett on Saturday, the games will be at Propstra Stadium.

But with new dugouts, a rebuilt infield and other improvements, the Clark baseball diamond is a far cry from the field that was used sparingly each summer.

"This field, I wouldn't say it was garbage, but it was pretty bad," said Clark second baseman Cory Henning, a 2006 Washougal High graduate who played several summer tournaments at the Clark field in recent

summers. "To see the transition is amazing."

Henning expressed a similar sentiment about his team, which has won five of its first 16 games and been competitive in most of the others.

"With all the rain, we've been trapped indoors for weeks on end, just hitting in the cages," Henning said. "Then to get out on the field, and play pretty well. I was pretty shocked."

The rebirth of Clark baseball became official on March 5 in Pendleton, Ore. The Penguins dropped a pair of one-run games to Blue Mountain Community College. One day later at Walla Walla, they got their first win in the second game of a double-header.

Don Freeman isn't surprised to have a competitive team. The Clark head coach credited his coaching staff with good prep work, and noted that his roster of players are guys who played a lot of ball growing up.

Still, the community college game is different. For one thing, wood bats are used instead of metal ones, which means hitters must make solid contact to get hits.

"You've just got to know what pitches you can hit well," outfielder Zach Girod said. "And you've got to understand the situation, too. We're not going to be a team that's going to hit a lot of home runs."

Did you know?

■ Clark College is fielding a varsity baseball team for the first time since 1992. Weather permitting, the Penguins will host Everett at 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. on Saturday at Hudson's Bay High School.

■ Much of the work has been donated to upgrade the Clark College baseball field — which the team hopes to soon call its home — including work by Quail Homes. Quail Homes president Jon Girod is the father of Clark players Zach Girod and Jeremy Girod.

■ Of the 30 players on this year's roster, 13 are from Southwest Washington.

Clark:

From Page B1

Playing in a wood-bat league gives pitchers more room for error. Freeman said he's pleased with the effort and the execution from the Clark staff so far.

"Our kids have been pitching well. But when you're playing in a wood-bat league, that helps to keep the scores down," Freeman said. "Consistency in hitting is probably our weak point, but it's coming along."

Having baseball at the local college is prolonging the

playing careers for some local players. Girod, a sophomore out of Fort Vancouver High School, and Henning each said he wouldn't be playing baseball anymore if not for the Clark program.

"If they didn't start this program, I would be working 40 hours a week," Henning said.

As it is, Henning and his teammates are putting in extra field work. In addition to work on the field itself, the team has done extra work to raise funds for the program, and community service projects that help let Clark County know that its college has baseball.

Add in school work, and be-

ing involved with Clark baseball has been more than a full-time job since practices started in the fall.

"It takes a lot more time than people think," Girod said. "It's not just practicing every day."

Even with a 5-11 record, the results are tangible. Someday soon — with a little help from the weather, perhaps the league opener against Tacoma next weekend — Clark College baseball will play on the Clark College baseball field.

"When we do have that home game, one nice thing is going to be knowing that we're playing on something that we helped create," Henning said.