

A VICTORY FOR PERSEVERANCE AT CLARK

Three players are rewarded after enduring 0-30 year

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Most players would give up on a team after a winless season.

And many did when the Clark College softball team finished 0-30 last year. Only three players: Ashleigh Byrne, Lori Love and Kellie Preheim, returned for their sophomore season. Coach Kasey Powers also came back for his second season in the three-year-old program.

"It was really hard to want to come back," said Love, an Evergreen graduate. "Nobody

If you go

■ **What:** Clark softball season finale vs. Clackamas (doubleheader).

■ **When:** Saturday at noon.

■ **Where:** Hudson's Bay High School softball field.

■ **Information:** www.clark.edu/student_life/athletics/

really knows what it's like to have a no-win season."

The players, as well as the coach, all returned because they were optimistic. Even after suffering loss after loss, they knew the wins would come — eventually.

And this year Clark got its first win in two years on March 21, and then continued to pick up nine more wins. Clark is 10-34 overall, 2-24 in the Northwest Association of Community Colleges, with four games left.

The Penguins' season finale is Saturday at home against Clackamas.

While the number in the loss column overshadows the wins, it is a step in a positive direction.

"It could only go up from last year," Love said. "It really couldn't get worse. We wanted to try and make the best of it for the second year. We just kept a positive attitude and came back to see what we

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STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Evergreen graduate Lori Love said it was really hard to want to return to the Clark College softball team this season.

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could do.

"We've done amazing this year."

Powers was an assistant coach at Skyview for three years and also coached a summer league team prior to taking over the Clark program last spring. In those three years combined, Powers said he did not have 30 losses.

Powers took over the second-year Penguins right before the season began, and missed out on recruiting local star players needed to establish a program. The team was also in danger of folding because of lack of players.

"It was hard to get up and go to practice because even though I enjoyed the kids, I hated losing," Powers said. "I hated coming out here knowing we didn't have a chance last year. The only thing that saved me was the fact that the kids were such great kids."

Love and Byrne both said one of the reasons they came back for their second season was because of the players that came in this year.

While the Penguins' first win against Green River was important for the entire team, it meant a lot more for the returning trio, as well as their coach.

"I don't think we all realized it at first," Love said. "Then the three returners all kind of looked at each other and were like, 'Oh my gosh, we just won our first college game!' Then we started jumping up and down."

Clark has not won a game since April 20, when the Penguins defeated Yakima Valley 4-1.

"It's not so much the winning and losing (that's frustrating)," said Byrne, a Mountain View grad. "It's the fact that we're capable of winning. We're just not performing as well as we could be."

To put a positive spin on

the losses, Clark lost 10 of its games by five or less runs. The Penguins have also lowered their earned run average by nine runs to 7.49. They have cut down on their errors and are consistently turning double plays — an improvement from last year when they were just trying to get an out, Powers said.

"This year we come out every game and I know we have a chance," Powers said. "If we play how we're capable of we have a chance of winning."

But the long season has started to wear down Clark's roster which shrunk from 16 players to 12. Powers has started the Penguins on a weight training program, in hopes to prevent injuries in future seasons. For some, it was their first time having to lift weights.

"We don't try to change how they play," Powers said. "I'm going to tweak things here and there when we need to, but the thing I can change is their work ethic in the weight room."

Since the top four teams out of the six team south region advance to the championships, Clark's season ends this weekend. But Powers and assistant Sara Ross are already looking ahead to next year and the year after.

Local players who want to stay closer to home are calling Powers. Current players are texting their former high school teammates to join the Penguins. Eight players have given verbal commitments and two have signed.

"They'll keep building and they'll keep getting better," Love said. "They'll be a team to watch out for in the future."

Love has come to terms that her softball career will conclude after this season since she plans to attend WSU Vancouver for nursing school. But Byrne doesn't want to end after only enjoying 10 wins in two seasons.

"It's not really how I pictured it," Byrne said. "I would love to (continue playing), especially going out like this."