

Pitching and defense deep for GC softball

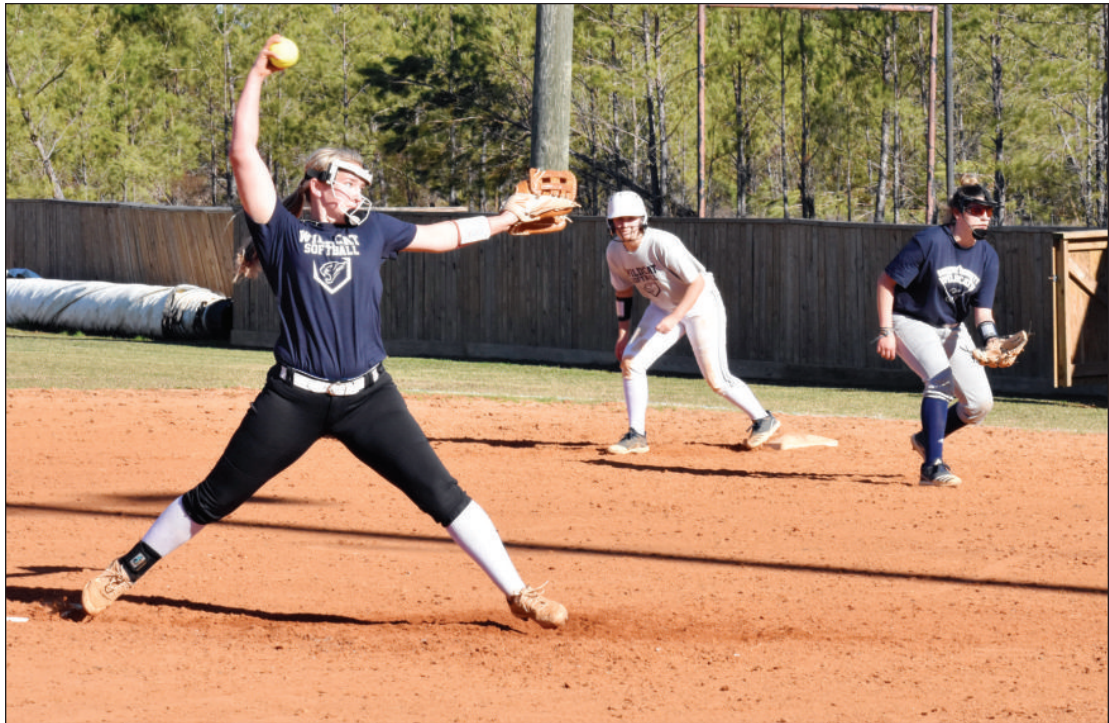


Photo by Russell Turner / Herald Staff

Talent in the pitching circle is always a good thing in softball. Depth and talent, well that is a bit of a unicorn for most high school coaches, but GCHS has just that this season with three very capable arms in the rotation. Sophomore Taylor Brewer (shown throwing here in a scrimmage) has emerged as a big-time player and compliment to senior Hannah Hillman and junior CharLeigh Stewart, both of which come into the season with tons of experience.

By **RUSSELL TURNER**
Herald Staff

There are a lot of things one could point to as strengths for this year's GCHS softball team. But, none are more noticeable than the depth and talent in the pitching circle.

The Lady Wildcats are blessed with three solid pitching options in senior Hannah Hillman, junior CharLeigh Stewart and sophomore Taylor Brewer. Hillman is by far the most experienced with 222 innings pitched since the eighth grade. She has 120 career strikeouts, compared to half as many walks. She would be the ace on many of the teams the Lady Cats will face this season, but will likely see more time in relief this season, instead of as a starter.

"We have a lot of confidence in Hannah," Barham said. "She can keep us in a lot of games just with her experience in the circle."

"She can be a starter or she can come in as a reliever and get us out of jams or be the closer in the later innings. She had three good innings of work against Taylorsville and provides a nice contrast to both Taylor and Charleigh."

For her part, Hillman said she was just excited to be back in a GCHS uniform for her senior campaign.

"It was terrible that we had our season cut short last year," Hillman said. "I have played softball for as long as I can remember and to be able to play my senior season means the world to me."

"One of our biggest

strengths is how close we have grown together over the years. We have close bonds and know how to pick each other up when things aren't going our way. We consider each other as family."

Stewart has been an active part of that 'family' since junior high as well and a big part of the pitching rotation. She has 92 career varsity innings under her belt with an overall 8-7 record. She had posted a 3.06 ERA in four games last year. She took the loss against Taylorsville, but Barham said he was pleased with the way she performed in the four innings of work.

"I thought she threw well," Barham said. "She didn't give up any walks and kept us in the game."

"We are expecting a lot out of her this season."

Brewer has just 24 varsity innings under her belt, but is 3-0 in three career starts. She really emerged as a force last season and enters this year with high expectations. She threw a complete game against Pascagoula with five strikeouts in four innings.

"Taylor has the opportunity to be a very special player if she continues to progress," Barham said. "I am really looking forward to seeing her reach her full potential over the next few years."

"We are going to lean on her a lot this season, but she won't have to carry the load all by herself. We are blessed to have three solid options in the circle."

Barham is also excited about

the young pitchers that will see action in junior varsity games this year. Eighth graders Laken Pierce and Erin Meadows will see the lion's share of the innings for the JV team, but Barham will hope to get seventh grader Zamiah Knight opportunities as well.

"Laken really fills up the strike zone and focuses on pitching to contact and letting her defense work for her," Barham said. "Erin is more of a power pitcher that looks toward striking batters out."

"Knight, much like Erin, is a high velocity pitcher that could end up with a lot of strikeouts. We feel that having these three arms will allow us, much like with our varsity squad, to mix and match who we put in the circle, while not overworking any one pitcher."

While having three pitching options helps take the pressure off any one individual pitcher, so does the experience level on the Wildcat defense. While Barham is still tinkering with his lineup, he has five returning starters and plenty of options at his disposal.

Leading the way are junior CharLee Meadows and seniors Tiana Caver, Hannah Hillman and Kat Garrett. Each has been a letterman since junior high and are experienced at multiple positions.

Meadows, who is getting a ton of attention from collegiate coaches, appears to be

locked in as the team's starting shortstop. She is a gritty player with a strong arm and high softball IQ. Garrett, who has signed with Jones College, is currently slated to play second base, but could also play elsewhere in the infield or outfield.

"CharLee is a grind-it-out type of player that brings a lot to the table," Barham said. "She is very smart and can play anywhere on the field. We like her at shortstop, but she could move around if needed."

"Kat is a difference maker for us. She is projected as a second baseman at Jones, but like Meadows, can play just about anywhere. She is a tremendous athlete and competitor and our team really feeds off her."

Sophomore Breanna Walley will back up Meadows at shortstop, while Jaylon Walley will play behind Garrett at second.

Hillman saw a lot of time in the outfield last year when not in the pitcher's circle, but will be moving back to first base this year, where her size and athleticism will be a real plus. Brewer will back her up and cover first when Hillman is in the circle.

Eighth grader Gracie Brown has moved across to first base and will field that spot in junior varsity action.

Senior Tiana Caver will be the quarterback of the defense as the returning starter at catcher. Seventh grader Lilly Rau is the number two behind the plate and the catcher of the future for the Wildcats. Rau also can provide depth in the outfield.

"Hannah does a great job at first and so does Taylor so we feel really good about them," Barham said. "Tiana just keeps getting better as a player. She is very good defensively and is our voice/coach on the field. But, the area I think she has grown the most is as a vocal leader on the

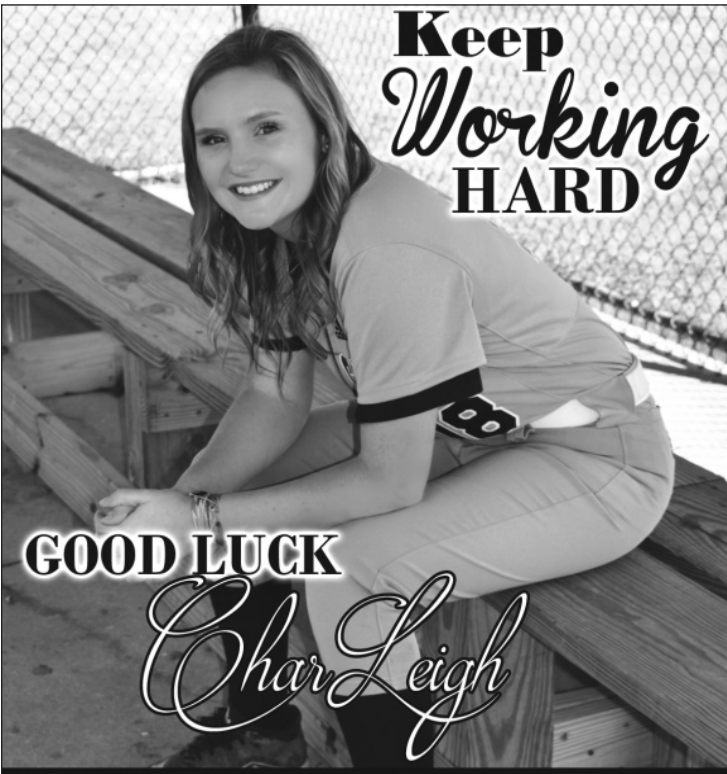
team."

Seventh grader Kambrie Lawrence appears to have the edge for the everyday starter at third base, but senior Jen Walley is competing for playing time there as well. Walley

has not played softball in a couple of years, but has shown her competitiveness and athleticism as a starter for

See **DEFENSE**

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Keep Working HARD

GOOD LUCK

CharLeigh

Let your light so shine before men, that they might see your good works, and glorify your father in Heaven.
Matthew 5:16

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