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### Cal's momentum headed in one direction

By Graham Hays, ESPN.com, Feb. 8, 2010

It's time to take a quick tour -- two by two this year -- through some of the best teams out there.

#### No. 7 California

Coming off a second consecutive appearance in a super regional, despite having to win back-to-back regionals on another team's field, Cal's momentum appears headed solidly in one direction. Not least because in addition to losing just two starters from last season's team, the Bears add Washington transfer Jace Williams, who managed a .914 OPS as a freshman for the Huskies in 2008, and a freshman class highlighted by the EA Sports All-America battery of Jolene Henderson and Lindsey Ziegenhirt.

And you don't have to look very far in Berkeley to see that even in the country's best conference, newcomers can prosper without much of an apprenticeship.

The Pac-10 season can knock the wind out of just about any freshman. Like the SEC in football or the ACC in women's soccer, there are no easy games but ample opportunities for tailspins. So it's not without note that the conference grind is also where Cal freshman Jamia Reid caught her second wind during a successful debut for the Bears.

In 19 conference games last season, Reid hit .377, seventh in the league, and stole 13 bases, tied for the lead with Washington's Ashley Charters. The former came on the heels of a .352 batting average in her 37 nonconference games. Granted, the Pac-10 might not have featured its usual assortment of aces last season, and 19 games is a tiny sample size. But Reid still stood out, even in the company of other freshmen who wasted little time putting themselves among the elite.

In addition to Reid, five other freshman in the Pac-10 hit at least .300 for the entire season: Ashley Hansen (.400), Stanford; Kimi Pohlman (.360), Washington; Lini Koria (.352), Arizona; Katelyn Boyd (.308), Arizona State; Andrea Harrison (.303), UCLA. Of that quintet, only Pohlman's average improved during conference play, from .359 to .361.

#### Fresh Talent Adds Spice to Potential Cal Run

By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, Feb. 11, 2010

Record-setting teams don't usually lose in heartbreaking fashion, but the No. 11 Cal softball team--which set team records in home runs and steals last season--has missed out on the Women's College World Series in each of the past two years.

Both misses came after unlucky draws pitted them against then-No. 1 Florida in the Super Regionals, match-ups that resulted in two close losses.

But it's spring again, and the frustration has been replaced by optimism -and not without good reason. Last year's squad was one of the fastest and strongest in Cal softball history; this year's may be faster and stronger.

A young roster that lost just senior Gina Leomiti returns with more experience and more talent, a combination the Bears hope will erase the mistakes that often saw them leave runners on base or allow unearned runs.

The star of the lineup is again utility player Valerie Arioto, who was named both as an alternate for the U.S. National Team and to the preseason watch list for Collegiate Player of the Year.

The junior standout, who handles both pitching and first base duties, will be joined on the mound by Jolene Henderson, as well as catcher Lindsey Ziegenhirt. The pair of freshmen, who were All-American teammates at Sheldon High, arrive at Cal as arguably the top recruits in the country at their positions.

"They're both a positive impact on our team," pitcher Marissa Drewrey said. "Because they've played together so long, I think it just brings something (more) to our team. When I was a senior in high school, our team played their high school team. They've improved so much (since then)."

The additions strengthen the Cal pitching staff tremendously, giving it three players to rotate in and out through the grind of a long season.

"It's really a big advantage because it's not uncommon for one of your pitchers to go through a period of what we call dead arm," coach Diane Ninemire said. "If you only have one pitcher and you're relying on just that one arm to get you through, it's quite a task to ... be able to give yourself a really good opportunity to finish strong."

Even so, Cal's No. 1 pitcher is still undecided, with Drewrey coming off knee surgery and Henderson seeing her first collegiate competition in this weekend's Arizona State Tournament in Tempe, Ariz. The Bears will start their season against Texas A&M tomorrow at 11:30 a.m. MT.

"It's a game-by-game thing," pitching coach John Reeves said. "They're all a little bit different which makes this good. If somebody has to come in, it's not the same thing, not the same style, not the same kind of pitches, not the same everything."

The Bears have also become more versatile at the plate, particularly with the addition of left-handed Washington transfer Jace Williams. Sophomore Jamia Reid, another left-handed hitter, will also hope to improve on a freshman campaign that saw her set a school record with 47 steals.

"We have enough left-handed hitters that we could alternate right, left, right, left if we wanted to in the lineup. There's not many teams that can do that," Ninemire said. "But what it helps is it creates again an opportunity to score runs because you're able to sometimes hit it behind those runners and get them from first all the way to third."

Despite its improvements, Cal is slated to finish just the fifth or sixth in the Pac-10-which, with half of the nation's top 12 teams, is far and away the sport's most competitive conference.

"It's a great place because it gives a lot of room to improve and that's what we like to see in this young team," Ninemire said. "They're given some respect but they're gonna have to go out there and earn it."

### **Cal Takes Four Straight After Losing Opener at Kajikawa Classic**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, Feb. 16, 2010*

Valerie Arioto had the Cal softball team's first win of the season in her sights last Friday. The All-American had allowed just one hit to Texas A&M through six innings and, with a 2-0 lead, headed into a final seventh that seemed like a formality.

But then she walked two of the next three batters. The Aggies' Sydney Shannon smacked the ball out over center field for a 3-2 lead, and the No. 11 Bears dropped their opener at the Kajikawa Classic in Tempe, Ariz.

"I was kind of disappointed in myself," Arioto said. "I felt like I let down my teammates, but they picked me up in the next game."

That next game was a 3-1 win over Wisconsin the same day. The three after that went even better.

After allowing three runs against Texas A&M in one inning, the Bears allowed the same number the rest of the weekend. The result was a 4-1 start to the season. Two of the four wins came via five-inning mercy rulings.

Saturday began with a 9-1 romp over Western Michigan in five innings, a game that was then followed by a 6-1 win over Kentucky. They closed out the tournament on Sunday with their second mercy win, an 8-0 victory over Portland State. It was a series of performances which, if nothing else, showed that Cal could shake off close losses.

"(The first game) was really humbling," Arioto said. "Coming in we were like, 'Oh, we got this,' which is a good mentality to have, but it's very

humbling that something like that happens to you. It could go either way and it didn't go our way.

"Really, no team in the nation is going to be undefeated at the end of the season. I guess we just got ours out of the way."

The tournament also signaled the collegiate debut of pitcher Jolene Henderson and catcher Lindsey Ziegenhirt. The pair, who were All-American teammates at Sheldon High in Sacramento, both announced their arrival emphatically on the Arizona State campus.

Henderson started on the mound against Wisconsin and Kentucky to notch two wins, while Ziegenhirt had four home runs, including a grand slam against Western Michigan.

"They did really well. Didn't take them any time to get comfortable this weekend," Arioto said. "It changes (the dynamic) a little bit just because it adds a little oomph to our lineup, but I think they fit really comfortably in with the team ... The chemistry's really great right now."

But chemistry alone won't get the Bears back to the Women's College World Series. Even with the added talent, Cal will have to cut down on its missed opportunities to earn a trip to Oklahoma City, Okla.

"We haven't seen a lot of live pitching," Arioto said. "Of course, we had a lot of home runs, a lot of hits, but we definitely need to get those that runners we left on base ... We just need to make some little improvements and we're good to go."

"This was the best, I think, we've ever started off."

### **Drewrey, Cal to Face Top-25 Opponents in Vegas**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, Feb. 19, 2010*

Marissa Drewrey tested her knee. The Cal softball team's senior pitcher had surgery over the summer, and last Saturday's game against Western Michigan was her first start of the season. It was time to see how it would hold up.

Jitters? Not this time.

"Usually-this has happened every year-I've gotten really nervous just because it's the first game, but (this time) I had no nerves," Drewrey said. "Nothing about me showed that I was nervous and I didn't feel nervous at all."

"Even pitching live at practice, I've been a little shaky, not completely confident with my pitches. But I actually felt like I was really confident."

That confidence propelled her through all five innings of a 9-1 mercy-rule win that included seven strikeouts-and that same level of aplomb is what the No. 11 Bears hope to carry today into the Louisville Slugger Desert Classic in Las Vegas, Nev.

The tournament, which begins with a 9 a.m., matchup against Illinois-Chicago at Eller Media Stadium, will present a much stiffer challenge for Cal (4-1) than last week's season-opening Kajikawa Classic at Arizona State.

Unlike that competition, which presented no ranked opponents-Texas A&M jumped into a tie for No. 21 only after defeating the Bears, 3-2-Cal will be closing this weekend with three consecutive games against top-25 teams.

Saturday will include games against 12th-ranked Oklahoma and No. 21 Northwestern, while Sunday will follow with the Bears' first look at a higher-ranked team: No. 9 Georgia Tech.

"We try not to think about it, but we do know that those teams are going to be tougher," Drewrey said.

One focus for Cal will be to execute more at the plate and reduce the number of runners left on base, something that was a problem at times both last season and last weekend. With the blowout wins no longer a likely outcome this time around, every run becomes more precious.

In addition, the pitching rotation of Drewrey, junior Valerie Arioto and freshman Jolene Henderson is still somewhat unsettled this early in the season.

"They just tell us kind of right before the game," Drewrey said. "It's a little frustrating, but that's just how it is. Later in the year, they'll have an idea of who's throwing better, so that's who's going to start, but right now it's just anyone."

While the Bears' starter for each game is still undecided, who will be catching them is not. When pitching coach John Reeves suffered a bout of pneumonia, freshman Lindsey Ziegenhirt ended up taking a bigger role by calling pitches herself-experience that could prove invaluable as the season continues.

"She called all the games," Drewrey said. "It was all about Lindsey. It was up to her, what was going to happen."

### **Cal Loses to Two Ranked Teams, Then Beats No. 9 Georgia Tech**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, Feb. 22, 2010*

The Cal softball team had just suffered two consecutive losses to top-25 teams, and with No. 9 Georgia Tech lined up for Sunday, the last day of the Louisville Slugger Desert Classic wasn't looking bright.

But backed by a strong all-around performance from junior Valerie Arioto, the No. 11 Bears reeled off a 4-1 win in Las Vegas, Nev.-their first of the season over a ranked team.

Arioto, who had nine strikeouts through seven innings, also put up the first points of the day for either team with a three-run homer in the sixth inning. Holding the lead for good, Cal (7-3) handed the Yellow Jackets (8-1) their first loss of the season.

The game was a rebound performance for the Bears after a 12-1 loss to No. 12 Oklahoma and a 5-3 loss to No. 21 Northwestern-struggles which may have stemmed from feeling too much pressure.

"We weren't playing loose," Arioto said. "We wanted to perform so bad (against the better teams) that it didn't go our way ... I think me, along with everyone else on Sunday, just played relaxed and let the game flow."

Allowing their play to unfold more naturally resulted in six hits and four RBI, a dramatic turnaround from the mere two hits the team managed against the Sooners. The improvement was also a result of more focus and energy from the team, as well as increased patience in the box.

"(Against) Oklahoma, we were swinging out of our shoes and we were swinging at pitches like 1-2-3," outfielder Frani Echavarria said. "Our pitch selection was terrible. I thought we beat ourselves."

The lack of offensive production against Oklahoma was also compounded by the six runs the Bears allowed in the fifth and final inning, something that underscored a rough Saturday. Cal, however, turned its attention towards what was coming next.

"We were just focused on bouncing back, on the (Sunday) game," Arioto said. "You can't really change anything after the day's over, so you just gotta keep looking forward to the next game."

The tournament, which began on Friday with an 8-1 blowout over Illinois-Chicago and a come-from-behind 10-4 win over Utah, offered a an early-season barometer for Cal.

"It showed the character we have, that we don't let a couple of runs get us down," Echavarria said. "With this stiffer competition, it does make us better. Even if we do lose or we do come off on a win, it's only going to set us up for a great postseason and maybe get us a better seeding than we did last season."

Of course, the postseason is still months away, and wins and losses in February will likely be forgotten when May and June roll around.

"Right now, we're still learning and playing together," Arioto said. "It's not how you start but how you end. We're on a good road right now."

### **Cathedral City Classic Gives Cal a Chance to 'Bounce Back' From Last Weekend's Losses**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, Feb. 26, 2010*

For the Cal softball team, two losses in last weekend's Louisville Slugger Desert Classic in Las Vegas, Nev., equaled a three-spot drop in the rankings and one simple lesson.

"You can't have an off-game," freshman pitcher Jolene Henderson said.

Maybe not, but the No. 14 Bears will certainly have a little more leeway when they play Fordham today at 3:30 p.m., to start the Cathedral City Classic.

The trip down to the Big League Dreams Complex in Cathedral City, Calif., will provide a welcome respite from last weekend's outing against three ranked teams.

After allowing a last-inning comeback to No. 22 Northwestern, followed by a 12-1 blowout loss to No. 9 Oklahoma, Cal turned its fortunes with a 4-1 win over eighth-ranked Georgia Tech.

It was a win that the Bears hope will start a winning streak.

"It's like a bounce back from last tournament," Henderson said. "If we keep going like that, it'll be a steady climb up to getting better."

That climb will likely be less steep than it was in Las Vegas. This weekend, the Bears are not slated to face any ranked teams -- and just two that received votes in the ESPN.com/USA Softball rankings, San Diego State and Oklahoma State. Cal (7-3) will play both those teams on Saturday, and end the weekend with tilts against Colorado State and Long Beach State.

The less intimidating schedule will only help as the Bears try and sew up some of the holes still left in their game.

Despite having a team batting average of .318 -- led by sophomore Frani Echavarria's blistering .483 mark -- Cal has been inconsistent in driving in baserunners. It's a problem that the team saw last season as well, but one that still hasn't gone away.

"We've done half of the job; now we just need to finish it," Henderson said. "Get them on base and we've got to score."

Added catcher Lindsey Ziegenhirt: "We just need to string our hits together and get more timely hits instead of just spraying the ball around."

Something else that's carried over from last season is Cal's speed. With sophomore Jamia Reid's team-leading 13 steals -- a number which puts her on pace to surpass the school-record 47 she nabbed a year ago -- the Bears have become by far the fastest team in the Pac-10. Cal has been caught stealing on just four of its 41 attempts. The next best team in the conference, Oregon, has just over half of Cal's total.

"We have our negatives, but then we have our positives and right now I think the positives outweigh the negatives," Henderson said. "We get the job done."

### **Bears Give Up Leads Late in Weekend Tourney**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, March 1, 2010*

Late innings haven't been the brightest times for the Cal softball team so far this young season.

After starting off the Cathedral City Classic with a 5-2 win over Fordham last Friday, the No. 11 Bears took a 5-1 lead into the sixth inning against San Diego State the next day.

Cal (11-4) held on for a 5-4 win over the Aztecs in Cathedral City, Calif., but saw the same problem against Oklahoma State that afternoon.

A two-run advantage -- the result of a second-inning home run from senior Vernae Sevilla -- evaporated in the sixth after the three Cowgirls rounded the bases, helped along by an error at second. The result was a 3-2 loss for the Bears -- the third time this season they've squandered a lead in the sixth or seventh inning.

"We start walking lead-off batters, they get hit, we get an error, they score, and the next thing you know they're back in the game," coach Diane Ninemire said. "It's something that we really need to stress; that we cut down our walks, that when we get the lead, (we hold on)."

Maintaining those leads will require avoiding mental mistakes that result in errors, and cutting down on walks in what Ninemire calls an effort to "establish ourselves on the mound."

"(We're) trying to stay focused in the later innings," junior pitcher Valerie Arioto said. "Even if Cal takes a big lead, it's just staying focused and closing the door."

Cal did more than close the door yesterday, rebounding from their loss and closing the tournament with dominant performances at Big League Dreams Complex. The Bears dispatched the Colorado State in five innings Sunday morning, earning their fourth mercy win this spring, 9-1. An 8-1 thumping of Long Beach State followed shortly.

The blowouts were a result of the team being able to bring base-runners home -- including a four-run third inning against the 49ers -- something it's struggled with at times both last season and this.

"We clearly capitalized on situations with two outs," Ninemire said. "We were able to have a few big innings where before we would get one or two runs and sit on it. We were able to break through in innings where we could manufacture several runs at a time and just break open the door."

"If we do that, then it takes the other team off their game."

More encouraging for the Bears may be the sheer number of games left in the season. Although it has lost to lower-ranked teams, there is more than enough time for Cal to work out the kinks before the postseason begins in late May.

"It was a learning experience again," Arioto said. "It's still the beginning so hopefully we can get out of the little funk we keep having."

### **Bears' Speed Key to Five-Game Vegas Jackpot**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, March 4, 2010*

The No. 15 Cal softball team has yet to play at Levine-Fricke Field this spring, having spent every weekend of the season away from Berkeley.

After a scheduled home-opener against UC Davis was rained out yesterday afternoon, the Bears will continue working through their tournament slate.

Cal takes on New Mexico State tomorrow at 11:15 a.m. at the Eller Media Stadium Classic in Las Vegas, Nev.

The trip will be the second that Cal (11-4) makes to the UNLV campus this year. It played in the Louisville Slugger Classic there just two weeks ago, the most competitive field that it has seen this season-and one which ended with a 4-1 win over No. 9 Georgia Tech.

And although the Bears will have to head into another five-game weekend without a home respite, they don't expect to be road-weary just yet.

"We're used to playing that many games," junior pitcher Valerie Arioto said. "It's just something we do pretty much every weekend for seven weeks straight in the season, so I don't think that has anything to do with focus at the end of the day. It's just us being able to shut the door and not let the other team come back."

Cal has struggled closing out games this season, having given up leads in the sixth and seventh innings three times. Its struggles can be attributed to untimely defensive mistakes.

"We're just trying to establish ourselves on the mound a little bit better, cutting down our walks and errors," coach Diane Ninemire said. "We had some throwing errors and walked too many batters."

But in their past two games, the Bears were able to blow out both Colorado State and Long Beach State with a combined score of 17-2. The opponents this weekend may continue the trend.

New Mexico State (9-4) will be just one of two teams with winning records that Cal will face, with the other being host UNLV (9-6) on Sunday.

The Aggies and the Rebels sandwich an unimpressive threesome-Southern Utah, Portland State and winless Weber State-that has managed a collective record of 5-27.

Cal's biggest strength should stand out against these opponents. What hasn't been an issue for the Bears this season is moving along the bases. They've been caught stealing just seven times on 56 attempts, putting them on pace to break the team-record 146 set a season ago.

"It puts a lot of pressure on the defense," Ninemire said. "Most teams don't have an answer for that right now. The one major concern in facing Cal right now is trying to figure out how to keep their feet off the base paths, because once they're on, they're nearly unstoppable."

"It really creates problems for defenses and it forces people to make errors and rush throws."

### **Cal Sweeps Five-Game Weekend in Las Vegas**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, March 8, 2010*

The Cal softball team's five-win sweep wasn't official until UNLV's Korin Cuico grounded out to third to end the Eller Media Stadium Classic yesterday, but the signs had been there all weekend.

Friday's opening game against New Mexico State saw the Bears tie their season high with 12 hits and win 6-0. No. 15 Cal repeated the feat less than 24 hours later -- this time victimizing Portland State, whom they'd first set the mark against back in February.

It was the Bears' second trip to Las Vegas, Nev., this spring, and it certainly looked like they enjoyed themselves. When it downed the host Rebels their home field, Cal had finished thoroughly dismantling its competition, blasting 39 runs while allowing just three against their five opponents.

The catch, of course, was that just two have winning records while one--Weber State--is still winless. It's a fact that isn't lost on the team, but not one that completely discounts its commanding performance.

"We were more comfortable because we were playing teams we knew we would be dominating, but that just kind of let us play our game," catcher Lindsey Ziegenhirt said. "We just need to carry that over, that comfort, to when we play big teams like UCLA, Washington. Keep that confidence in ourselves and that kind of swagger that we have on the field."

That confidence also came with renewed energy, something that had been absent in slower starts against other teams.

"Sometimes we come out a little bit flat, but this weekend we came out with tons of energy every game," pitcher Jolene Henderson said. "We didn't play down to any other team. We stayed up on our own level the whole entire time and just stayed energetic."

This weekend, the Bears scored runs early and often in every game, reaching home no later than the second inning. The first few weekends of the season were plagued by stranded runners, but it's a problem that appears to have increasingly faded away in recent match-ups.

"It's a good thing because it shows that we've been getting lots and lots of runners on, but we need to be able to score those runs," Henderson said. "Coach calls it the 'green zone,' so when we get people in the green zone, you've got to score them."

Henderson was on the mound to yesterday for her sixth win of the season, but it was junior Valerie Arioto that started the weekend off with a one-hitter against the Aggies, and shutout win against Portland State the next day gave her a total of 23 strikeouts. The pitcher, who also plays at first base, also put the Bears on the scoreboard with a two-run homer in the first inning of the tournament.

Cal returns home for the first time this season at on Friday against East Carolina at 3 p.m.

### **Battery Pack**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, March 9, 2010*

A softball swings out from Jolene Henderson's hand, thumping into Lindsey Ziegenhirt's mitt for what seems the millionth time.

On second thought, a million feels conservative. Might be closer to a billion.

"Probably a quadrillion," Lindsey guesses. "A googol."

It gets hard to keep track after 11 years, which is about how long the pitcher and catcher have been together. Eleven years that stretch back to when their teams were still called the Teal Tigers and the Purple Stardust, back to when Lindsey's mom still rewarded their in-game achievements with charm necklaces.

When the Cal softball team landed the duo to lead what was the No. 3 recruiting class in the nation, it didn't just gain a pair of All-Americans-players who reached their CIF section championships every year of their careers at Sacramento's Sheldon High.

It added a battery which came ready with the rare chemistry that can only be developed after years and years of playing with each other.

When the catcher acts as a sort of on-field pitching coach-part psychologist, part strategist-communication across the 43 feet between them is absolutely essential.

"Lindsey knows what I'm gonna do before I do it," Jolene says. "She's gonna know what I want to throw. If something that I do is wrong, she'll help me with it and vice versa."

They first met when they were seven. Born into softball families, neither had much of a say in which sport they picked.

Lindsey's mother, Laura, played college ball and coached their rec ball and ASA teams. She ended up at catcher because her older sister threw too hard-and often too wildly-to risk having other rec league girls behind the plate.

Jolene moved to the mound after she refused to pay attention in the outfield, opting to play with the grass instead of the ball.

The two got better quickly. Once they were 10, they moved up two divisions. By the time they were 15, they were playing with the 18-and-unders. Entering high school, they could already keep up with college-bound seniors.

"It was just exciting to watch," Sheldon High coach Mary Jo Truesdale recalls. "To see Lindsey be able to hit the ball not just over the fence, but over the scoreboard and the second fence is pretty phenomenal. To watch Jolene just put batters down over and over again, and them not being able to come close to hitting what she was able to throw.

"I think from the very beginning you could just sense how special they were."

The time spent together on the field resulted in a close friendship off it. From winning an ASA national title with the Lady Magic club team to spending \$3,000 on designer jeans, they've more than figured out each others highs and lows. The pair thinks of each other as sisters-so much so that Danielle, Jolene's Cal-bound younger sister, also thinks of Lindsey as family.

"We were always Jolene and Lindsey, pitcher and catcher, Cal battery mate combo," Lindsey says. "If they interviewed one, they interviewed the other. If one person's on the news, it was because, 'You and Jolene did it together.' We signed together on TV."

It was a signing that had been in the works since they were sophomores. The Pac-10 is consistently the top conference in the sport, and Cal's close-to-home location made it an easy choice for a pair that knew it wanted to stay together.

Jolene verbalized when she was just a freshman, with Lindsey following less than a year later. Just as they often were on the field, the two were ahead of the curve, committing before their older teammates as part of an early recruitment trend.

Now roommates in their Clark Kerr suite, fit seamlessly into a Bears squad looking to return to the Women's College World Series for the first time since 2005.

Lindsey-tagged as the "Big Hurt" in a nod to the slugger Frank Thomas of Chicago White Sox fame-leads the Bears with 24 RBI, and is behind only U.S. National Team alternate Valerie Arioto with four home runs and a .729 slugging percentage.

Jolene, meanwhile, has notched six wins with a team-low 0.81 ERA.

"I don't feel like the (college) players have that much of a physical advantage over us," she says. "It's more like a mental thing because they're already there ... We stopped to think about it and like, legit think about it-we played with some of these players before ... It's not as big as a jump as people say it is."

No one's saying that anymore. Twenty games in Cal uniforms have already made the campus feel like home for the duo. They've even switched out their nine-year-old handshake-one that ended with a sizzling fingertip on the other's shoulder-for the "bear claw," a sort of interlocking high-five.

What little nervousness they felt had evaporated by the first practice and game of fall ball, a fact that's clear from their impact this spring.

"I'm calm the whole time," Jolene says. "Lindsey's always calm behind the plate. We're like relaxed kind of players. Relaxed intensity, though. We're super intense, but we just look confident in what we're doing."

It's a swagger, as Lindsey calls it, and it still has four seasons left to grow.

### **All the Comforts of Home Await Bears in California Tournament**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, March 12, 2010*

Playing at Levine-Fricke Field gives the Cal softball team a few measures of comfort. It gets to feed off the energy of a home crowd. It gets to play on dirt that it's more accustomed to.

And it gets to pick its own music.

When the No. 13 Bears (16-4) host the California Tournament this weekend -- a first for the program -- it's these little things that will make this season's Berkeley debut feel so welcome for Cal.

The familiar surroundings will likely boost the confidence that has characterized the team's seven-game winning streak, one it hopes to stretch against East Carolina today at 3 p.m.

"I think we're more relaxed, not playing pressured," said junior utility Valerie Arioto, who will be accompanied on the mound by Soulja Boy's "Turn My Swag On." "When we start playing uptight and nervous is when things go wrong."

Not much has gone wrong at all for her recently. With senior pitcher Marissa Drewrey still recovering from knee surgery, the pitching rotation of Arioto and freshman Jolene Henderson has been more than capable.

In Cal's five-game sweep of the Eller Media Stadium Classic in Las Vegas, Nev., last weekend, the U.S. national team alternate had a 0.00 ERA in two wins, allowing just four hits and notching 23 strikeouts. The performance earned her the first Pac-10 Pitcher of the Week award of her career.

"That's a tremendous recognition for her because Val's never really been looked at as the go-to pitcher here at Cal," coach Diane Ninemire said. "She's that utility player that can play defense, she can hit and she can pitch. She's kind of a rare breed these days."

Arioto also leads the team with six home runs and an .851 slugging percentage, contributing to a Bears squad that has seen improvements in both hitting and pitching.

Having limited both walks and runners left on base, the focus for the team this weekend will instead be trying to build its fielding percentage -- now at .967 -- up above 98 percent.

"Most of our errors are not fielding errors as much as they are throwing errors," Ninemire said. "A lot of it just has to go back to basics of making sure you've got your feet turned and your shoulders turned and you're throwing the ball accurately. ... Then we'll be able to turn double plays and we'll be able to make routine plays that we should be making."

Less routine will be the state of Levine-Fricke Field this spring. The ongoing construction at neighboring Witter Rugby Field -- part of the Memorial Stadium retrofit -- has both increased noise and limited the amount of available parking.

"It sucks because not a lot of people will be able to come to the games," sophomore outfielder Jamia Reid said. "And probably windows will be shattered if there's any home runs."

### **Cal Bats Away Three Wins in Return Home**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, March 15, 2010*

Diane Ninemire decided to make a bet.

Catcher Lindsey Ziegenhirt had yet to manage a hit through the Cal softball team's first two wins in the California Tournament, their first home games of the season-if the drought continued, she would owe her coach a trip to Fenton's.

But with the bases loaded yesterday against UC Davis in the bottom of the fourth, the freshman cracked the ball against the fence, bringing home three runners with a double that nearly became a grand slam. The hit put the game out of reach for the visiting Aggies, and was part of a seven-run inning that secured the No. 13 Bears' 8-0 mercy win.

"She told me after she got the hit, 'I couldn't take you to Fenton's because I gave up ice cream for Lent, so I decided I better get a hit,'" Ninemire said. "Sometimes you've got to play a little game-within-a-game to get them relaxed, get them re-focused on having fun and just knowing that they're a good hitter and they can come through in that situation."

Taking a one-run advantage into the fourth inning, Cal (19-4) closed the first tournament ever hosted at Levine-Fricke Field with a dominating performance, filling up the bases with an array of singles and bunts. After junior Valerie Arioto earned a walk with the bases loaded for Cal's second run, the Bears' bats came alive.

Ziegenhirt's double was next, followed shortly by senior Vernae Sevilla's three-run homer. The scoring barrage opened up what had looked like



a repeat of a 2-0 win over the Aggies earlier that afternoon.

"We were kind of hanging on with just a one-run lead and they were starting to flirt with getting on base," Ninemire said. "When you're only one run ahead or so, you're always only one crack of the bat away from possibly losing the game. I'm glad when we had the opportunities later in the game, we came through with some great hits ... It pretty much put their backs against the wall."

The offensive outburst was also coupled with a stiff defensive stand. The Bears allowed just two hits in the second half of their doubleheader against the Aggies, and just five hits throughout the weekend. After a Friday game against East Carolina was rained out, Cal similarly crushed Cal State Fullerton on Saturday, holding them scoreless in another 8-0 mercy win.

With the three-win weekend sweep came after spending the first four weekends of the spring on the road, the Bears came back to Berkeley with a different pre-game environment then they had grown accustomed to.

"There's a lot of distractions before the game," Ziegenhirt said. "We're not in a hotel so we're not isolated from everybody. It kind of felt like a normal day and then you're like, 'Oh, I've gotta go play a game.'"

### **Bears Look to Stay Relaxed in Hawaii Trip**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, March 17, 2010*

The Cal softball team is taking an early spring break trip.

After reeling off wins in their first three home games this past weekend, the No. 12 Bears jetted out to Hawaii yesterday for the four-day Chevron Spring Fling. The tournament, which starts today at 7 p.m., against Lipscomb, will see Cal play two teams ranked just outside the top 25 -- the Lady Bison and the host Rainbow Wahine -- three times each.

With a home game lined up against Pacific next Wednesday, the Bears won't have a chance to leave Berkeley for any extended amount of time as the rest of the campus empties. Instead, the six-day jaunt to the islands will provide a chance to relax in between games.

Of course, Cal already knows how to do that.

"Circle breathing," senior Vernae Sevilla said. "We'll do it once a week at least, and we'll talk about it. If we have any kind of stress, we'll come in, 'Everybody relax! Circle breathing, just relax.' Just a little team thing."

Their ability to stay calm before games has been the key to the Bears' current 10-game winning streak. After dropping close games in the first few weekends of the season, Cal has charged through its recent schedule by stressing confidence in its own game.

A six-game slate spread out over four days will also be different from the usual five games the Bears cram into a three-day window. The change more than balances out the quick turnaround Cal had to make, getting just a two-day break after Sunday's doubleheader against UC Davis, while also providing an opportunity to use a larger rotation.

"Three games per weekend for us is a piece of cake as far as the load, so we'll be absolutely fine," coach Diane Ninemire said. "We have a lot of depth on this team. I don't feel like we're gonna have to be overloaded on one player. We have a number of players we can play in the game and it kind of keeps everybody fresh and it keeps everybody in the game and everybody gets to continually work on their game."

That added work for the bench will help clear up any blemishes before conference play begins. The Pac-10 houses five teams ranked above Cal, including No. 1 Washington and No. 2 Arizona, and the team's already diminishing habit of walks and stranded runners will need to be completely erased.

"It's going to be the difference of maybe one error in a game that either wins or loses a game," Ninemire said. "You almost have to play near perfect ball. Any time you get an opportunity to score in Pac-10, you better score because it may be your only opportunity in the game."

"The pressure's on in the Pac-10 and we need to use these games in the next weeks to give us the confidence that we need to come through."

### **Bears Finish Nonconference Play With a 28-6 Mark**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, March 29, 2010*

When Jolene Henderson took the mound during the Aggie Stampede this past weekend, the freshman pitcher was hampered by distracting coughs.

Spring break had left a handful of Cal softball players plagued with a variety of illnesses and ailments, but it didn't slow them down as they posted four wins in Davis, Calif., to close their non-conference schedule.

"On the last day of the tournament, we're all getting over our sickness," Henderson said. "It's like we're really getting rid of all the bad stuff before we get into the Pac-10."

There isn't too much of the bad stuff left. Yesterday's 4-0 win over UC Davis at La Rue Field earned the No. 14 Bears (28-6) their best preseason record since a 31-3 non-conference finish in 2006.

It was Cal's third victory over the Aggies in as many games this spring, and the second shutout win of the tournament after a 3-0 blanking of UC Riverside on Saturday. The perfect weekend also included wins over Sacramento State and St. Mary's, games in which the Bears allowed a total of just three runs.

"You have to dominate in your preseason," coach Diane Ninemire said. "You've got to get your wins early on. You have to hope that all the games that you play leading up to Pac-10 help prepare you for playing in the best conference in the country."

The first of these games will come in this weekend's three-game trip to No. 9 Stanford. To knock off the Cardinal, the Bears will have to avoid missing out on scoring opportunities.

Although sophomore outfielder Jamia Reid rung off the very first pitch of yesterday's game for a triple -- a play followed by two walks from the Aggies' Marissa Araujo -- the Bears managed just one run for the inning. It's a problem that would have proved much more costly against nearly any of the Pac-10, a conference that currently has five teams ranked in the top 11.

"Coach calls it 'kicking the door in' on the other team," senior second baseman Shannon Thomas said. "Getting that lead where they can't really come back and then coming in and playing defense like we have been. Really generating more runs that we should capitalize on ... We need to continue to do so throughout the game instead of stopping."

On defense, Cal has been anchored by junior utility Valerie Arioto, who won her first Pac-10 Pitcher of the Week award earlier this spring. In her two starts in the tournament, she recorded 16 strikeouts, allowing just three hits and no runs.

"(It's changed) a lot," Arioto said of her approach to pitching this season. "The biggest thing is just my mental game is different. I'm more so just trying to spin the ball and trying to be smart and be creative instead of trying to overpower the hitters, which I did last year."

### **Mounds of Talent Await Bears at Stanford**

*By Joseph Cannon, Daily Californian, April 1, 2010*

It's been a nice, long vacation for the Cal softball team. Tempe. Honolulu. Palm Springs. And Las Vegas-twice.

For the past month and a half, the No. 14 Bears have been racking up more than frequent flyer miles. They have been piling on the wins as well, tallying 28 victories with only six losses.

As you know, all vacations must come to an end, and today is that day for Cal. The squad opens up its run through the most challenging conference in the nation, meaning that it will probably experience a few more defeats than it did in recent weeks.

"You're not going to go undefeated in the Pac-10-it's pretty much impossible," junior Valerie Arioto said. "Hopefully we do, but the chances are slim to none. I think we've put ourselves in a good spot with our preseason performances."

And of all the teams to begin with, the Bears will take on No. 9 Stanford at Smith Family Field tonight in Stanford at 7 p.m.

The Cardinal (25-4) are one of five conference teams (depending on which poll) to be ranked in the top 10 nationally. What seems most impressive about Stanford is its pitching staff, comprised almost solely of freshman Teagan Gerhart, the sister of former Cardinal running back Toby Gerhart.

And while that may be a story in itself, the real story for Stanford has been the shoes that she has filled-first team All-American pitcher Missy Penna.

In four years, Penna was 119-44 with a 1.82 ERA. To say she was good would be an understatement. To say that the Bears will benefit from her graduation has yet to be seen.

"It's great for me. I don't think I ever got a hit off her," transfer Jace Williams said of playing Penna during her time in Washington. "I'm actually glad she's gone."

"It's about time," Arioto added with a laugh.

But Frani Echavarria saw it a bit differently.

"I'm actually sad to see her go," Echavarria said. "She's one of those great pitchers who actually gets you prepared for what you're going to see down the road."

"But, we're still going to be going against the new freshman. And I think Teagan Gerhart is actually going to be a big challenge this year."

Echavarria would know; she faced Gerhart in high school and lost. Gerhart has been superb this season as well, boasting a record of 18-3 with a 1.28 ERA, including two no-hitters and a perfect game in two days.

Because of the new Pac-10 scheduling-where teams play each other three times in one weekend rather than twice in a weekend and again a few weeks later-this series constitutes the only shot that the Bears have against their conference rival.

"You used to get that second chance at teams a few weeks later," Williams said. "We now realize that we get this one shot. We can't rely on playing them again and maybe bringing our A-game next time."

### **Scoreless Duel Ends When Ball Bounces Stanford's Way in 12th**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, April 2, 2010*

The Cal softball team's first Pac-10 game of the season last night didn't end after the seventh inning. Or the eighth. Or even the ninth.

It wasn't until a dozen innings had passed that the No. 14 Bears (28-7) finally walked off of Smith Family Stadium at Stanford, leaving over three hours after the first pitch with little more than a stinging 1-0 loss. What had been a scoreless affair finally tilted in No. 9 Stanford's favor in the bottom of the 12th inning.

A hit-officially a sacrifice bunt-down the third-base line tipped off of Cal third baseman Vernae Sevilla's glove. Listed as an error, the play put runners on first and second with one out. Cal pitcher Valerie Arioto then intentionally walked the Cardinal's Ashley Hansen-a .385 hitter-and the bases were loaded.

The next Stanford (26-4) at-bat resulted in another hit towards third base and pitcher Teagan Gerhart reaching home plate for the game-ending run.

It was also Gerhart, younger sister of former Cardinal running back Toby, who played a huge part in blanking the Cal hitters. The freshman, who now has a 19-3 record and has practically carried her team's pitching staff this season, proved her worth again with 10 strikeouts yesterday.

But the performance was hardly one-sided. Arioto made a stirring duel out of the game, recording 10 strikeouts of her own-including three against Gerhart.

Batters on both teams could barely make contact for most of the game, with just two hits on each side through the first 10 innings.

"Val did a tremendous job," second baseman Shannon Thomas said. "She gave us ground balls. She gave us plays to get the outs. She went 12 innings. You can't ask any more from a pitcher."

Both teams also had opportunities to end the game much earlier. Stanford failed to score with the bases loaded in the bottom of the fifth. Cal had runners on first and second in the sixth inning, but freshman Lindsey Ziegenhirt struck out swinging after making contact on seven pitches.

In the bottom of the 11th inning, Stanford right fielder Maya Burns was thrown out at home plate after trying to advance from second base on a single.

The Bears have their second shot at the Cardinal today at 7 p.m., with the final game of the series scheduled for 1 p.m., tomorrow.

"If we face Teagan again, we'll be ready for her," Thomas said. "We'll be more prepared. We'll string together some hits so that we can score some runs."

### **Bears Avoid Sweep in Weekend on the Farm**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, April 5, 2010*

The third time was the charm for the Cal softball team at Stanford this past Saturday.

After two losses to start the weekend, the No. 14 Bears broke through in their last match-up against the Cardinal, reeling off three two-run innings for a 6-0 win.

Cal didn't have to wait long to get on base. Sophomore left fielder Jamia Reid reached first on the very first pitch of the game, taking advantage of a throwing error by Stanford shortstop Jenna Rich.

Three pitches later, Reid advanced to second on a sacrifice bunt from Shannon Thomas, putting the Bears in scoring position with All-American Valerie Arioto coming up to bat.

Facing a full count, Arioto didn't disappoint, crushing a two-run homer into left field of the No. 9 Cardinal's Smith Family Stadium and giving Cal (29-8, 1-2 in the Pac-10) its first lead of the series.

It was one that only grew as the innings rolled on.

In the top of the third, freshman catcher Lindsey Ziegenhirt got her first hit against Stanford (27-5, 2-1) and pitcher Teagan Gerhart, another two-run homer over the left-field fence.

"I was pretty confident in my swing," she said. "I was hitting the pitcher pretty well the whole weekend, even though a lot of my really good hits were fouls. I felt pretty much like I knew what pitches she had and I went up looking for a pitch and she threw the one that I was looking for."

The steady scoring continued in the fourth. A triple from Reid drove in two more runs, and resulted in Gerhart being replaced by Rich for the rest of the game.

With Arioto pitching seven scoreless innings-bringing her weekend total to 19-the Cardinal couldn't make any sort of dent in Cal's lead. While the junior didn't rack up her highest strikeout total of the season-she had four while allowing seven hits-she forced Stanford hitters into ground ball after ground ball.

The emphatic win offered some measure of redemption for the Bears, who opened the series with a heartbreaker on Thursday night, losing their first Pac-10 game of the season, 1-0, in a 12-inning thriller.

They followed that showing with a 5-1 loss on Friday, with freshman pitcher Jolene Henderson allowing three runs in the fifth inning.

"After the first loss we were tired, disappointed. We felt like we definitely could've won that game," Ziegenhirt said. "We turned it around today, to not let it happen again, to show them that we should've won on Thursday."

The win put coach Diane Ninemire's career total at 999, having spent 23 years in Berkeley becoming the winningest coach in Cal history. A recent inductee of the National Fastpitch Coaches Association Hall of Fame, she will be looking to reach her 1,000-win milestone at home on Wednesday against Sacramento State.

### **Mid-Season Reviews**

*By Daily Californian Sports Staff, April 6, 2010*

#### **Team: Softball**

The No. 14 Cal softball team knows what it's like to just miss. For two consecutive seasons, the Bears have been ousted in the Super Regional, the final round before the College World Series in Oklahoma City. Now, with the addition of two superstar freshmen and spectacular play from one of the best players in the nation, coach Diane Ninemire's squad looks primed to play in the Sooner State.

Cal lost only one player from last year's squad, and the addition of standout first-years Jolene Henderson and Lindsey Ziegenhirt have fortified a young, but experienced squad. Henderson's ERA of 1.00 is the best on the team and she's the only pitcher to earn a save for the Bears this season.

Ziegenhirt, Henderson's high school teammate, has effectively managed the pitching staff in her first year and has established herself as a big bopper at the plate. The freshman catcher leads Cal with 37 RBI and is second on the team with eight home runs. With table-setters Jamia Reid and Shannon Thomas at the top of the order and fellow power-source Valerie Arioto in the three-slot, Ziegenhirt is quickly establishing herself as a feared cleanup hitter.

If the Bears continue to receive the two-way contributions from Arioto (she leads the team in home runs, slugging percentage and on-base percentage at the plate and wins and strikeouts on the mound) as well as consistent pitching, they should finally be able to book a trip to Oklahoma.

Honorable Mention: Rugby

*-Gabriel Baumgaertner*

#### **MVP: Valerie Arioto**

Valerie Arioto has done it all for the Cal softball team this season.

Selected in January to the USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year watch list and as a U.S. national team alternate, the junior utility player hasn't disappointed.

Need offense? She leads the team with nine home runs and a .741 slugging percentage, and is second in the Pac-10 with a .579 on-base percentage.

Want pitching? The All-American earned a career-first Pac-10 Pitcher of the Week last month for her efforts, and currently has 189 strikeouts and a 1.03 ERA--both top-five marks in the conference.

Her importance to the team was highlighted in this past weekend's rivalry games at Stanford.

In Saturday's 6-0 win over the Cardinal, Arioto gave the Bears their first lead of the series with a two-run homer while forcing out after out on the mound.

Two days earlier, she dueled Stanford pitcher Teagan Gerhart in a 12-inning thriller, notching 10 strikeouts before finally giving up the 1-0 loss. "She's just a great player," coach Diane Ninemire said.

"You don't really see that in a lot of other pitchers out there who play a lot of different positions and are also the leading hitter on their team. Val is simply the complete player and she has the skills. She's a very big factor in our team."

Honorable Mention: Emily Csikos, W.Polo

-Jack Wang

### **Ninemire on Verge of Win No. 1,000 Today Against Sac State**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, April 7, 2010*

Diane Ninemire hasn't mentioned it to the No. 13 Cal softball team.

Not a word about how she's about to notch her 1,000th win as the Bears' head coach. Nothing about how she's on the verge of reaching another milestone in her 23rd year at Cal. No indication that today's visit from Sacramento State is anything more than another 3 p.m. mid-week game.

"I didn't even really know about it," freshman pitcher Jolene Henderson said.

It's not something that the players themselves have even discussed, but calls from a few parents ensured that the occasion wouldn't pass by completely unnoticed.

"I had figured it out for myself before the season started, but I had forgotten and I didn't calculate what team it would be (against)," said freshman catcher Lindsey Ziegenhirt, whose mother reminded her. "I knew she would get it during the season sometime."

Perhaps it hasn't garnered much attention because of everything else she's achieved her. Look along the left-field fence of Levine-Fricke Field and you'll see the most important result of Ninemire's two-plus decades: a national championship commemorated with a simple "2002" marked in white paint.

Those 23 years have seen Ninemire reach the Women's College World Series nine times, including seven consecutive trips from 1999-2005. A year ago, the Bears (29-8, 1-2 in the Pac-10) reached the NCAA Regionals for the 24th season in a row, the nation's second-longest streak and one that's unmatched in the Pac-10.

More important than any win count has been the team's season-long quest for the World Series in Oklahoma City, Okla., somewhere they haven't been since 2005.

"You can't make it more than what it is," Ziegenhirt said. "It's just another game, like just all her other 999 games, but it means something a little more when it's over. You can't make it anything so important because then you just play different. You're gonna play more on edge."

"We just have to keep in in perspective for us and then celebrate after the game and try not to think about it too much before the game."

There isn't likely much to worry about for this particular game. Although the visiting Hornets (10-23) kept it close against the Bears two weeks ago in a 3-1 loss at the UC Davis Aggie Stampede, they're still a team that started six freshmen and three walk-ons.

But after a missed opportunity to get the 1,000th win at Stanford in a series that included a 12-inning, 1-0 loss, Cal will at least have a near-guaranteed chance to notch the victory for Ninemire on the field she's known for so long.

"It's kind of bittersweet," sophomore Frani Echavarria said. "We really could've gotten that win for her -- you know, shoulda, coulda, woulda. If we couldn't get Stanford at least we can bring it home for her."

Added Ziegenhirt: "It's kind of fitting to get it at home. She's been at Cal for a long time in her career so I think it's cool that she reaches a really big milestone while we're at Cal."

### **Cal's Shutout of Hornets Worth a Thousand Wins for Ninemire**

*By Joseph Cannon, Daily Californian, April 8, 2010*

Jolene Henderson tried to give coach Diane Ninemire a perfect 1,000th win. She almost did.

But a one-hitter got the job done all the same, as the No. 13 Cal softball team blanked Sacramento State, 6-0, to put Ninemire over the millennium mark Wednesday afternoon at Levine-Fricke Field.

"Almost doesn't mean anything," Henderson said of being three outs away from a perfect game. "It would probably have been cooler if I had won a thousand games too, but we're all really happy for her. It was cool that I got to pitch in this game."

And Ninemire was grateful for more than the "lights-out" performance she got from her freshman pitcher.

"I've been so fortunate to have had such a long career at Cal," Ninemire said after being doused in Silly String by her players. "There's no place I'd rather be than here."

Ninemire's career at Cal has spanned 23 seasons with an average of 44 wins per season, with 40 wins being a benchmark of a great year by collegiate standards, and a World Series championship. Not to mention the fact that she's the winningest coach in Cal history in any sport.

A thousand wins is just another feather in this hall-of-fame coach's storied career. She is the ninth coach in collegiate softball history to crack

1,000.

"It's been a nice journey and one that I'm not willing to hop off of anytime soon," Ninemire said. "I've got many more years left to go."

Her team's dominating showing against the Hornets might indicate that the Bears (30-8) are capable of making more history for their boss this year.

Henderson got some lift from her offense early on, with two runs coming in the first inning.

On the other end, Henderson was hardly letting Sacramento State (10-24) make contact.

Several pitches into her at bat in the fourth inning, the Hornets' Kelli Frye built up a 3-0 count on Henderson. After watching two strikes go by, one of her teammates from the dugout yelled to her, "She's not going to walk you." Frye was late on the next pitch but managed to foul it off to stay afloat. The next pitch led to an easy groundout to short, extending Henderson's perfect game into the fifth.

Sacramento State's difficulties weren't confined to the plate either, having serious trouble fielding Valerie Arioto. In the bottom of the first, an error on a dropped ball turned a triple into an inside-the-park home run.

Then, with the bases loaded and two outs in the fourth, Arioto hit a routine pop fly in between the second baseman and the right fielder. But because of a miscommunication, losing the ball in the sun, or some combination of the two, all three runners scored, bringing Cal's lead to 6-0.

But this win-like the other 999-will be washed off Ninemire's shoes before a weekend series at Oregon.

"I never take the dirt from another game into the next," Ninemire said. "I always say, 'It's a new day, a new game, and you gotta bring your best every day.'"

### **Players Keep the Mood Light Going Into Weekend at Oregon**

*By Joseph Cannon, Daily Californian, April 9, 2010*

Cal softball trainer Jason Dinius is waiting for his bag at the luggage carousel.

With every passing rotation, there are fewer and fewer bags. Still, his bag has yet to come around.

This always happens to him. His bag never comes around on the luggage carousel.

"Usually my bag is last, and it's always missing," Dinius said. "I'll usually find it around the corner or it'll be on the bus without me knowing."

No, this isn't a story about a magic bag. This is the calculated practical joking of the softball team.

Sometimes, as pitcher Marissa Drewrey explained, they'll even put his bag on the stationary part of the carousel so that it never comes around.

"He's fun to mess with; he gets so mad," Valerie Arioto said. "That's the best, when he gets mad."

Last night, when the Bears landed in Oregon for their three-game set against No. 21 Oregon (26-6), which opens tonight at 6 p.m., at Howe Field, it's safe to say that Dinius' bag was missing.

"They take any chance they can to get me," Dinius said. "Usually the airport is the prime opportunity. They never miss an opportunity."

But his players aren't letting him paint himself as an angel-they want to make it clear that this is a back and forth battle.

"Don't let him fool you," freshman pitcher Jolene Henderson said. "He's a little player."

Earlier in the season, Dinius pulled the old cut-the-bottom-out-of-the-cups trick. So when Amy Bishop went over to fill one up, it was soggy socks for her.

From a numbers standpoint, Dinius doesn't stand a chance as the only other male member of the traveling squad is pitching coach John Reeves.

While Reeves has pulled his fair share of pranks in the past, like putting plastic lizards in people's bags last year, Dinius said that Reeves is sticking with the verbal banter this season.

"He's more into making fun of the girls," Dinius said. "He's got my back though. I'm glad he's here."

And in a season that spans four months and over 60 games, keeping the mood light has proven to be a good thing with the Bears advancing to the Super Regionals for two straight years.

This season, No. 15 Cal has compiled a 30-8 record coming into this weekend's series with Oregon. The Bears are fresh off a dominating performance against Sacramento State, where Henderson was three outs away from tossing a perfect game and coach Diane Ninemire won her 1,000th game at Cal.

The win was a much needed lift after dropping the first series of Pac-10 play to No. 9 Stanford. The Bears enter this series 1-2 in the conference.

One thing about these practical jokes is that, when it's time to play a game, the jokers take a break. But as soon as the game's over, there's no telling what they'll do to each other.

"We don't plan what we're going to do to Jason," Arioto said. "It's spontaneous. We just see something and say, 'Yeah, let's do that to him.'"

### **Fuiava's Walk-Off Homer Lifts Ducks Over Cal in Nine Innings**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, April 12, 2010*

Perfect in her last four at-bats, Oregon first baseman Monique Fuiava felled the No. 15 Cal softball team on Friday with a two-run double in the bottom of the ninth.

Two days later, the junior did it again facing two outs with a walk-off home run to cap an 8-6 win.

The pair of games-both of which took nine innings to finish -sandwiched a 1-0 shutout effort from the No. 21 Ducks, who completed their season sweep of the Bears (30-11, 1-5) at Howe Field in Eugene, Ore.

Oregon (28-6, 5-1) entered yesterday's 2 p.m. match-up as the best hitting team in the Pac-10, and its .340 average proved to be no fluke.

After lighting Cal up for a dozen hits on Friday, the Ducks logged another nine in yesterday's comeback victory for a weekend total of 23.

Sunday's game started off with a solo home run for Oregon from center fielder Neena Bryant in the first inning.

It was a lead that didn't last long, as the Bears responded emphatically in the second and third innings. Juniors Valerie Arioto and Jace Williams both scored on errors, while freshman catcher Lindsey Ziegenhirt hit an RBI single to build a 3-1 lead.

Oregon right fielder Sam Pappas then crushed the first pitch she saw into left field for three runs in the bottom of the third, notching her team-high 11th home run of the season.

The back-and-forth continued in the fifth with another RBI double from Williams and a two-run homer by Arioto pushing Cal ahead, 6-4.

In the bottom of the sixth, Ducks shortstop Kelsey Chambers forced a tie with a two-run home run of her own, one that lasted until Fuiava's game-ending heroics.

"Just keeping the ball low is all (we needed to do)," freshman pitcher Jolene Henderson said. "If we came up even a little, they hit it. Hitting our spots better will probably help."

The sheen on what had been an impressive preseason is starting to rub off two weekends into the conference schedule. After dropping just six games in over a month of nonconference play, Cal has nearly doubled its loss total.

But the Bears aren't being blown out in these games. Their biggest loss was a 5-1 decision to Stanford-one they avenged with a 6-0 showing the next day-but one- and two-run losses count just the same.

For one reason or another, Cal simply hasn't been able to pull out close games against elite competition, something they must face week in and week out in the Pac-10.

"You just can't miss," Henderson said. "When you make a mistake, everyone else capitalizes on that mistake instead of them not being able to. Every runner that gets on we have to get in.

"When it comes to the end, we need to get them scored."

The bright side for the Bears is that there are still many games left to play in the season-games they hope will result in more wins. They travel to Tempe, Ariz., for a series against No. 10 Arizona State on Friday.

"I think we're on our way," Henderson said. "We're not peaking at the beginning of the season. Instead, we're on a slow roll up a hill instead of a sprint."

### **Slumping Hitters Need to Find Swings at ASU**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, April 16, 2010*

Jolene Henderson stops to describe a moment from her Tuesday practice, the first in a week leading up to the Cal softball team's game against Arizona State today at 7 p.m.

One of the freshman pitcher's drop balls had dropped a tad too far, and pitching coach John Reeves' attempt to avoid it ironically resulted in his

toes swinging directly into its path.

"I was throwing pretty hard too," the freshman pitcher said.

The end result was a painful hop and yell for Reeves, and a limp that had him hobbling around Levine-Fricke Field for the rest of the day.

Still, the man kept making his customary quips throughout the day. At one point, he started bestowing nicknames like "Bone Crusher" and "Dead Man Walking" to his players--their names withheld here to spare them the embarrassment.

It was a lighthearted, jocular atmosphere befitting of a team that had won 29 of 35 preseason games--but one less so of a team two days fresh off a sweep by now-No. 17 Oregon.

The three losses have dropped the No. 19 Bears (30-11, 1-5) to a last-place tie in the conference standings with eight-ranked UCLA, most recently the victim of the No. 7 Sun Devils' (35-6, 4-2) own three-game sweep.

The key culprit? The Bears' recent hitting slump.

Although the team has been slugging at a .422 average to their opponents' .256 on the season, those same numbers dip and rise to .296 and .373 against Pac-10 teams.

"Our bats, at times, have gone dead together," coach Diane Ninemire said. "Can't explain that phenomenon either, but it happens. Hopefully, sooner or later our hits will fall in."

Even more crippling has been the timing of the hits given up. Nearly every one of the Bears' losses has been close, a fact that likely makes them all the more painful when the final out is made.

In their latest loss to Oregon--an 8-6, nine-inning decision--Cal held a two-run lead in the sixth before a two-run home run tied the game. Three innings later, Oregon's walk-off homer ended the game.

A day earlier, Henderson threw a two-hitter against the Ducks in a 1-0 loss, but one flew over right field in the second.

For a team that entered the season with expectations--now perhaps reduced to hopes--of winning the Pac-10 and making it first return to the Women's College World Series since 2005, the start has been less than stellar.

"It's been really hard," third baseman Vernae Sevilla said. "With us scoring a lot of runs, I feel like we're up there. We're just coming out at the unfortunate end. Now is a time to really pull together and dig deep.

"It's just a matter of holding our lead and staying on top of our game and staying focused ... I feel like there's gonna be a turning point happening soon."

### **Arioto Helps Bears to Sweep of No. 6 ASU**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, April 19, 2010*

Coming off a sweep by No. 17 Oregon that left it with just one win in the Pac-10, the Cal softball team traveled to Arizona State this past weekend badly in need of a statement.

Valerie Arioto was more than happy to oblige.

With a few swings of her bat, the junior utility player helped push the No. 19 Bears (33-11, 4-5 in the Pac-10) out of their last-place conference tie with their first Pac-10 series win this season, a three-game sweep of the No. 6 Sun Devils in Tempe, Ariz.

After a 3-1 win in the series opener on Friday, Arioto hit a sixth-inning, three-run homer that gave Cal an 8-0 lead. In the bottom of the inning, she handily finished off her two-hitter with her fourth strikeout of the game to mercy Arizona State (35-9, 4-5).

Less than 24 hours later, the All-American came through in the clutch once again.

With Cal holding onto a 3-2 lead in the fourth inning, Arioto stepped up to the plate with bases loaded and two outs. Facing a full count, she sent the ball sailing past the left-center field fence for a grand slam.

Arioto wasn't the only one who racked up runs for a Cal squad that looked like an entirely different team, putting on its most dominant showing this spring at Farrington Stadium.

Freshman catcher Lindsey Ziegenhirt added to the run total again in the seventh, hitting a one-run roundtripper to bring her weekend total to four.

Shortstop Taylor Kelly followed up with homer that scored center fielder Frani Echavarria, who had lined a single into left field on the previous at-bat.



Arizona State pitcher Hillary Bach was finally pulled after Kelly scored, but it hardly made a difference. Third baseman Vernae Sevilla walked up to the plate next and finished off the scoring total, 11-3, with a solo shot of her own on reliever Megan Elliott's second pitch of the game.

"I definitely don't think it was a one-person win or anything like that," freshman pitcher Jolene Henderson said. "Everybody counted. People came through and hit in such clutch positions to allow other people to get up to score and hit bigger runs. We just pushed through and came up and hit the crap out of the ball.

"We couldn't get any worse than where we've been. We can only go up, so we showed that we could go up, up, up."

Perhaps more surprising than the Bears' offensive eruption was the defensive stand they made against the Sun Devils. Arizona State had entered the weekend leading the conference in both hits and runs scored, but was limited to just four runs in three contests.

"We just came out and basically shut them down," Henderson said. "They're a very good team. It's just how much we have room to grow and how much we still have room to grow."

### **Bears Host Washington In Reunion For Williams**

*By Joseph Cannon, Daily Californian, April 23, 2010*

Jace Williams watched last year's Women's College World Series on television. She could've been on that field. She could've hoisted the national championship with a Washington team she was a part of only nine months earlier.

But Williams left the Huskies the September before. For what reasons, she won't say.

She's happier now at Cal. There's no bitterness of a lost title.

"I was rooting for them the whole time," Williams said. "It was great watching them win. I have no regrets. No hard feelings."

Before the season, Williams knew that she wanted to stay in the Pac-10, but didn't know where she'd end up.

According to Williams, Bears coach Diane Ninemire really helped her out, including getting her into Golden West Community College in Huntington Beach, Calif.

"(Ninemire) showed that she really wanted me to be a part of this team and that was the deciding factor," the now-sophomore said.

The former second team All-Pac-10 second baseman redshirted last season because of NCAA stipulations.

"There are so many rules and stuff that we didn't want me to violate any small one, so I had to stay away from the whole softball thing in general," Williams said, adding that she still worked out with her former travel ball team three times a week and coached a youth softball team in Los Angeles.

It didn't take her long to pick right back up in Berkeley where she left off in Seattle. This season, Williams is batting .321 and has tabbed 24 RBIs while moving around the infield in 43 starts.

"I love being back in California," Williams said. "I love the weather and I love my team, so it's a good fit."

This weekend will be her first opportunity to see her old team in person, as top-ranked Washington visits the No. 17 Bears, at Levine-Fricke Field for a weekend set that starts Friday at 3 p.m.

The Huskies return six starters from the 2009 World Series championship team and have rolled through most of the 2010 competition. They've tabbed a 35-4 record overall and is 7-2 in the Pac-10, good for first in the conference.

"It's always fun to go out there and challenge ourselves as a team," Williams said. "It's exciting."

The Huskies will also bring last year's national player of the year Danielle Lawrie. Not only one of the-if not the -nation's best pitcher, she's also batting .330 with 11 home runs.

"Danielle is an amazing pitcher," Williams said of her former teammate. "She is very, very, very good."

Williams explained that when facing Lawrie, you have to go up to the plate with an approach. Lawrie is a master of getting batters to chase her junk pitches, and the Bears (33-11, 4-5) will need to stay within themselves at the plate to have a shot at taking down the defending champs.

But a series win wouldn't be sweet revenge for Williams-it's only about her team.

"If we win these, this would put us up near the top of the Pac-10 and that's right where we want to be," she said.

### **Lawrie Pitches to Perfection in Series Finale Against Cal**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, April 26, 2010*

Danielle Lawrie proved again yesterday why she's the returning national player of the year, and she did it before a sold-out crowd of 600 at Levine-Fricke Field.

Facing a Cal softball team that had run-ruled her No. 1 Washington team a day earlier-when Lawrie didn't start-the pitcher threw her third perfect game of the season, befuddling the Bears at every single at-bat on her way to a 4-0 rubber match win.

"She kept us off balance," Bears coach Diane Ninemire said. "We only had a few good contacts against her and the rest of it was, how many strikeouts did she have?"

The total was 14, which fell short of the season-high 18 she posted in the series opener on Friday-a 10-inning marathon that ended in a 1-0 Washington victory.

Lawrie wasn't even aware of her own perfection until after she struck out junior Valerie Arioto to end the game.

"I thought they didn't have any hits, but it's not something that I really think about," she said. "When you think about it, you're like trying to be perfect and that's just not the point. The point is to keep them off the board."

While keeping No. 17 Cal (34-13, 5-7) off the board was a task that Lawrie handled magnificently, allowing just three hits through the weekend, it was something the Huskies (37-5, 9-3) struggled doing without her.

When freshman Baily Harris started in the circle on Saturday, the Bears erupted for eight runs in the second inning for a 9-1, five-inning upset-their first of a top-ranked team since 2003.

"What we found is that when they pitched Harris, we were able to hit her and when we put the ball in play their defense was not that stellar," Ninemire said. "They were making mistakes as well."

It was a lopsided affair that only gave Lawrie more motivation going into her second start of the weekend.

"You never want to get beat that bad and just go out nonchalantly the next day," she said. "You also need to prove a point."

But while Cal dropped the three-game series to Washington, it's also hoping that it didn't lose anything else.

During the fourth inning yesterday, sophomore outfielder Jamia Reid leaped up in an attempt to catch a line drive over the left field fence. In what initially looked like a highlight-reel play, she crashed into the fence just as the ball hit her glove, dropping it out for a two-run homer that extended the Husky lead to 3-0.

Reid lay on the ground for a few minutes as players and coaches crowded around her, but she got to her feet and was helped off the field. The impact aggravated a lingering shoulder injury, but the extent of it is still unclear.

"She's gonna be seen by the physician (today)," Ninemire said. "We just gotta see how quickly she gets over her soreness and can rehab and get everything back together."

### **Bears Look For 73rd All-Time Win Against Santa Clara**

*By Jack Wang, Daily Californian, April 28, 2010*

After Danielle Lawrie pitched No. 1 Washington a perfect game against the Cal softball team last Sunday, Bears coach Diane Ninemire preached about going back to work.

"We just have to go back to the drawing board and work on our hitting and figure out how to hit someone like her," she said.

The No. 16 Bears won't exactly have a chance to do that tomorrow when Santa Clara visits Levine-Fricke Field at 3 p.m.

Lawrie, the returning national player of the year, sports a 1.02 ERA and just earned her fifth Pac-10 Pitcher of the Week honor this season-good for a conference-record 15th time in her career.

The Broncos' team ERA is 5.49.

A week ago, a rain forecast that never came postponed Cal's (34-13) chance to extend a 45-0 winning streak against St. Mary's.

Today at Levine-Fricke Field-barring more inclement weather-they'll likely extend an even more astounding 72-0 all-time record.

The Bears aren't the only team that have the Broncos' number.

In the month of April, Santa Clara (9-25) has mustered just one win in 13 games. Floundering at 1-10, it is ahead of only last-place Weber State (1-39, 1-11) in the 12-team Pacific Coast Softball Conference.

The last time Santa Clara played a ranked team-then-No. 10 Stanford, in mid-March-they were shut out 8-0.

With a victory hardly at stake, Cal will have to push itself to fine-tune its game.

One particular area of focus will be defense. In last Friday's series opener against, the game was scoreless until Bears third baseman Vernae Sevilla's error in the 10th inning allowed the Huskies to score.

The game ended 1-0 shortly after.

"We've had almost an error in every game that we've played and that's one thing that I really want to talk about with the team. The defense has to get better," Ninemire said. "We've got to figure out how to lower those numbers.

"When you play the better teams, it's usually the team with the less errors that win. We've got to figure out how to complete the job."

The mid-week match-up also marks another game in the Bears' recent home stand, which has provided a pleasant respite from the weekly travel that composed much of the spring's first two months.

After the Broncos trek back home, Cal will host No. 3 Arizona in a three-game series starting Friday.

"It's definitely a relief because for a while we were traveling a lot and getting tired," pitcher Valerie Arioto said. "Good thing that we're home and we can get in a groove. I think it's an advantage just because you know everyone around you and you know this field."

### **Arioto Conducts Bears' Shutout With Duet of Solos**

*By Joseph Cannon, Daily Californian, April 29, 2010*

Valerie Arioto was raking all over Levine-Fricke Field on Wednesday.

With two outs in the bottom of the first inning, Arioto turned on the 3-2 pitch and sent a line drive up, up and away.

Last season, it would've landed somewhere on Centennial Road or in the parking lot. But with the construction of Memorial Stadium moving the football offices into portables where the parking lot used to be, the only thing that slowed down Arioto's rocket was the roof of the portable in left-center.

"(The home run) felt smooth coming off the bat," Arioto said. "When it hurts the hands, it's no good. It's that smooth feeling."

The junior then finished what she started, golfing a second solo shot onto the portables to mercy Santa Clara, 8-0, in six innings.

Arioto did it all. She pitched three innings and gave up only one hit, then stole a base after a walk in the fourth.

Not only did she score half of the Bears' runs, she raked parts of the infield during the 15-minute rain delay in the sixth.

"My dad was taking pictures of me because he said it's the most work he's ever seen me do," Arioto said. "This was a once in a lifetime thing."

After being the victim of a perfect game at the hands of Washington's Danielle Lawrie, which the No. 16 Bears (35-13) hope will also be a once-in-a-lifetime thing, they got to work right away.

"After seeing Danielle, who's the best of the best, it's a little different. I felt she really prepared us for this game," Arioto said.

Cal batted around in the first, turning Arioto's solo shot into a four-run inning. But there weren't many people to witness the offensive show-something they couldn't do on Sunday in front of a full house.

When the first pitch went across the plate at Levine-Fricke, there were 15 people in the stands. Only 11 more fans showed up after that, but the Bears put on an offensive display nonetheless.

With two outs in the second, Arioto got things started with a poke up the middle. Freshman Lindsey Ziegenhirt then crushed her first pitch for the two-run homer to put Cal up, 6-0.

Rain or shine, Santa Clara (9-27) couldn't get it going at the plate, managing only three hits against Arioto and Jolene Henderson.

In what was an unpredictable weather day, the game started in the sunlight after it had drizzled all day. Then it poured, only to clear back up in minutes with a bit of sunshine.

Arioto wasn't the only one tending to the yard work. The rest of her team also tried to turn the puddling infield into a playable surface-including coach Diane Ninemire, who led the charge to get the game restarted.

"When your grounds crew leaves, we're going to go out there with a little diamond dry and get the game restarted," Ninemire said. "We wanted to play."

## **New Week Brings Cal a New Pac-10 Juggernaut**

*By Joseph Cannon, Daily Californian, April 30, 2010*

There's no give in the Pac-10 schedule. No easy games. No vacations.

Since 1982, when the sport held its first College World Series, there have been only six teams outside of the Pac-10 to take the crown. Only two have done it in the last decade.

It's all Pac-10, all the time. This year may be no exception, as seven of eight conference teams are ranked in the top 20 and three are in the top five.

Week in and week out, No. 16 Cal plays a team that would hardly surprise anyone if it hoisted the trophy in Oklahoma City in June.

Last weekend, the Bears went up against the best pitcher in the nation, No. 1 Washington's Danielle Lawrie. This weekend, Cal will face the country's most productive offense in No. 3 Arizona for a three-game series at Levine-Fricke Field.

Some people say that the Wildcats' stats are embellished because of the thin desert air—they average 1.87 home runs a game, good for third in the nation.

"Arizona has always been a great hitting team, here or there," said pitcher and first baseman Valerie Arioto, who had two towering home runs of her own on Wednesday afternoon. "I think we can still sharpen things up on the mound. Jo (Henderson) has been really picking me up out there, so we're going to try what we did (Wednesday)."

In the six-inning win on Wednesday, Henderson and Arioto only allowed three hits, no runs and a walk, and struck out nine against Santa Clara.

But the most important part of the 8-0 win for the Bears (35-13, 5-7 in the Pac-10) was that they picked themselves up offensively right away after failing to even draw a walk in Lawrie's perfect game last Sunday.

"We definitely have to get our bats going," coach Diane Ninemire said. "I liked that we had zero errors on defense (on Wednesday). That's been something that's really been hampering us this year.

"(Arizona has) a really good combination of speed and power, fielding the ball cleanly and making the plays."

As for Cal's speed, base stealing specialist Jamia Reid may be out later than Friday's 3 p.m., start against the Wildcats (38-7, 8-4).

After crashing into the wall while trying to pull back a home run on Sunday, Reid was taken out of the game and did not return with an unspecified shoulder injury. Apparently, this is the same shoulder that Reid has been nursing all year.

The left fielder, who ranks second in the nation in stolen bases with .93 a games (41 total), sat out for the drubbing of the Broncos and may take the weekend off as well.

"It's a day-by-day process," Ninemire said. "I'm not going to bring her back too soon because we have to look at the bigger picture of the postseason.

"Whatever time she needs in order to feel good, ready and strong; I want to make sure that this time she feels good about it."

## **Bears Use Anger, Small Ball and Speed to Mercy Wildcats and Avoid Sweep**

*By Joseph Cannon, Daily Californian, May 3, 2010*

The No. 13 Cal softball began the weekend with an 8-0 beating and ended it with one too.

On Friday, the most productive offense in the nation delivered as advertised, as No. 3 Arizona run-ruled the Bears in five innings.

Motivated by a controversial finish to Saturday's 4-2 extra-inning loss, Cal returned the favor of a mercy yesterday in six innings.

"We were very angry about yesterday," second baseman Shannon Thomas said after Sunday's win. "We've seen them a couple of times and we were able to kind of pick at them today."

The Bears' frustrations stemmed from what they believe was a botched call in the eighth, when Brittany Lastrapes slid around catcher Lindsey Ziegenhirt and may or may not have touched home plate for the go-ahead run.

Cal's Jace Williams hit a lead-off homer to tie the game back at one, but in the minds of the Bears, it should have been the game-winner.

"I thought we had that game won, but we had that unfortunate situation with the girl missing home plate," coach Diane Ninemire said. "Our girls came out hungry (on Sunday) and played terrific."

The Cal squad (36-15, 6-9 in the Pac-10) came out with some small ball at Levine-Fricke in the last game of the series. The Wildcats (40-8, 10-5) couldn't handle the pressure or the ball. Of the eight runs for the Bears, six of them were unearned because of the Wildcats' five errors.

"If we put the ball in play, and make them work with our speed, they are bound to make errors," Thomas said. "They have to rush too fast to get the ball in and out and that's just an error waiting to happen."

In the first, Shannon Thomas' bunt moved Jamia Reid all the way around to third. Arizona third baseman Brigette Del Ponte tried to let the ball roll foul, but it stopped about a foot from the first base line.

With two outs, Williams hit a high bouncer up the middle, which proved too tough for the second baseman to backhand, and both Reid and Thomas came around to score.

Valerie Arioto had her change-up working, striking out nine en route to her 18th win of the season.

In the bottom of the fifth, the Bears loaded the bases with that offensive speed that Ninemire has developed at Cal. Elia Reid beat out a throw, sister Jamia hit a high bouncer that caused a miscommunication between the pitcher and first baseman and Shannon Thomas advanced the Reids with another textbook bunt down the first base line.

With no outs and the bases loaded, Arioto hit a sharp grounder right at shortstop K'Lee Arredondo, who bobbled it, plating Elia Reid.

After a sac fly from Williams, Frani Echavarria, then cleared the bases with a knock up the left field line, bumping the Bears lead to 6-0.

In the sixth, Arioto's lined a two-run single to enforce the run rule.

"I don't care what team we play," Thomas said. "No matter what they are ranked, if we put the ball in play, there is bound to be some errors."