

2005 CLIPPINGS

THE PROGRAM A Bold Vision

By Herb Benenson
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For years, Diane Ninemire toiled in virtual anonymity.

As head coach of the California softball team, she worked tirelessly to build a successful program up in Strawberry Canyon. Competing in the tranquil environment that surrounds Levine-Fricke Field above Memorial Stadium, her squad consistently ranked as one of the best in the country, earning Top 25 national rankings and NCAA Tournament berths every season of a tenure that began in 1988.

Then, something remarkable happened – the Golden Bears captured the 2002 national title and suddenly, people noticed. Behind a dominating pitching performance by senior Jocelyn Forest, Cal swept through both its regional and the Women's College World Series to claim the first NCAA title in a women's sport in school history.

With every game of the series televised by either ESPN or ESPN2, Cal softball found itself in the spotlight, and upon their return to Berkeley, the Bears were a team in demand. TV stations and newspapers requested interviews, and both the Oakland A's and San Francisco Giants offered invitations to throw out a first pitch.

Cal followed its 2002 run with trips back to the championship game the next two seasons, although the Bears fell to UCLA both times in their search for another NCAA crown.

Still, the attention Cal has received over its current stretch has continued to grow, so much so that Ninemire can no longer walk around incognito.

"When I was over in Europe last summer," said Ninemire, who served as an assistant coach for the Greek softball team at the 2004 Athens Olympics, "people from other countries recognized me just because they had watched us on TV. You never think that foreign countries are watching ESPN World, but it's often their only opportunity to watch softball. Television has done a tremendous service for us. Now, I can hardly go into a grocery store or walk into an airport and not have somebody say, 'Aren't you the Cal coach?' or whisper to me, 'Great season last year.'"

Ninemire certainly doesn't mind the extra notoriety, and given the state of the program, she probably can expect it to spread even more.

This spring, the Bears return all but one player from their 2004 NCAA runner-up squad – a group that includes four All-Americans – and entered the 2005 spring campaign ranked No. 1 in the country in both major polls. With that lofty status comes expectations, something the team doesn't shy away from.

"There's been a real change in attitude in terms of what they believe they can accomplish and what they can do," Ninemire said of her troops. "It's made a great difference in how well this team has done."

Added senior center fielder Kaleo Eldredge: "We expect to get to the championship game."

Ninemire arrived at Cal in 1983, serving as an assistant coach under Donna Terry for five seasons until being elevated into the head position in 1988. At that point, the Bears were two years removed from their first NCAA College World Series appearance and were coming off a conference championship in 1987.

Ninemire soon made the softball world take notice when she signed pitcher Michele Granger – the nation's No. 1 recruit and arguably the world's top player – to a letter of intent prior to the 1989 season.

Although Granger had to redshirt her freshman year due to an arm injury, she soon regained her 70 mph rise ball (equivalent to a 100 mph fastball in baseball) and earned first team All-America status four years in a row.

With catcher Gillian Boxx joining the roster in 1992 – another four-time All-American who would team with Granger on the first U.S. Olympic team in '96 – Cal earned a No. 3 national ranking and returned to the World Series during that '92 campaign.

The Bears were back at the Series four years later, but after finishing fifth in the eight-team finals that season, Ninemire and her staff decided a change was necessary.

"In the 1980s and early '90s, we were just happy to be at the World Series," Ninemire said. "Just to get there was the goal. But starting in 1996, we weren't happy where we were and how we were finishing. We decided to start pushing it, and the players started believing that it just wasn't good enough to be at the series anymore."

The results of that newfound emphasis soon began to pay off. In 1999, Cal won a then-school-record 51 games en route to the College World Series. Once there, the Bears eliminated defending champion Fresno State and reached the semifinals for the first time in 13 years.

"At regionals my freshman year, it was almost like we were supposed to win," said Candace Harper, Cal's starting third baseman from 1999-02. "But we had no idea what the World Series was all about."



Harper and her teammates would quickly learn that feeling, though. Since '99, the Bears have advanced to six consecutive World Series and are favored for their seventh straight appearance this June.

"There is a lot more respect for our team," said senior shortstop Chelsea Spencer. "We are Cal. People want to beat Cal. We're not the underdog now."

For years, the Bears were rarely mentioned in the same breath as perennial powers UCLA and Arizona, teams that always seem rank at the top of the polls and are in contention for the NCAA title. More often than not, when Cal did advance to the World Series, they had fewer All-Americans than any other school there.

Instead of fielding squads full of high school all-stars throughout the lineup, the Bears historically sported teams full of good but not necessarily spectacular players that performed at their best when the pressure was on. Statistically, Cal couldn't keep up with more celebrated programs, but more often than not, the Bears found a way to remain competitive with the nation's elite.

"It just seemed that in the 1980s, we had good players, but we really had to pull everything out of them," said Ninemire, who entered the 2005 season with more victories (755) than any coach ever at Cal. "A lot more work had to go into their development. We've been fortunate that we've always had a pretty good pitching corps. And not just one pitcher, but two. To me, that's worth a lot when you can have a duo that can have 20-plus wins each. One of our strengths here at Cal is having a long tradition of outstanding pitchers."

Granger, the Olympian and Cal Hall of Famer who completed her career in 1993 as the NCAA record-holder in single-season (484) and career (1,640) strikeouts, is clearly the most renowned hurler to play under Ninemire. But she has been succeeded on the All-American platform by Whitney Floyd (1995-96), Jocelyn Forest (2001-02) and Kristina Thorson (2004).

This year's staff of Thorson, senior Kelly Anderson and sophomore Sarah Adams may be the deepest and most complete in Cal history. Thorson, a junior, was 28-4 with a 0.87 ERA last year, while Anderson entered the '05 season with a 55-24 career mark and Adams tossed her first complete-game shutout vs. Iowa State this past Feb. 19, providing just a glimpse of her potential.

Much of the credit for the Bears' repeated accomplishments inside the circle goes to John Reeves, who is in his 12th season as Cal's pitching coach. Under his watchful eye, the Bears have had at least one All-Pac-10 pitcher in all but one of his years on the staff.

"John's been a real factor with development and helping get the pitchers up to another level," Ninemire said. "A lot of people say we don't have the hardest throwing pitchers – except for when we had Granger – but we are able to utilize the strengths of our pitchers by mixing speeds and locations. You can compare our staffs to almost anybody in the country."

While pitching has remained consistently strong, the Bears have significantly altered the makeup of the rest of their squad recently. For years, Cal put most of its offensive stock into the power game, waiting for the home run or extra-base hit to provide most of the damage.

Now, the Bears emphasize manufacturing runs with a combination of speed and strength. In 2004, for example, Cal stole 99 bases – more than the Bears had in their three previous seasons combined – with third baseman Vicky Galindo and outfielder Lindsay James swiping 23 apiece. The result was a team that outscored its opposition by 290-99 and still set a Cal record with 46 home runs.

"When you have a more balanced attack, there is so much more you can do," Ninemire said. "The ability to steal bases puts you in a whole different league."

With their successful multi-pronged approach to the game, the Bears are adjusting well to their new role as being one of the hunted. Owners of a veteran roster experienced playing at the pinnacle of the sport, players and coaches alike are particularly excited about what this season has to offer.

"We know we have the potential to win the national championship," Spencer said. "Not that we haven't known it before, but this year is, by far, the best team I've ever played on. We worked out so much harder than any team I've seen work out. We're all very determined and have the same goals. It's a special drive that we have this year."

Even given their recent history of repeated trips to the College World Series, the Bears are still hungry for more. The 2002 NCAA title placed the program on a higher platform, and Ninemire fully expects the championship trophy to have some company in the near future.

"We've just started to scrape the surface," Ninemire said. "We want to try to build a dynasty. We've been to the final game three years in a row. Now, it's time to win multiple national championships and build this into something that is truly special."

If that were to happen, the limelight will surely shine even brighter on Cal softball, and Diane Ninemire won't mind being recognized every time she shops at the grocery store at all.

DIANE NINEMIRE

The Mastermind

By Ryan Gorcey, Daily Cal Contributing Writer

Tuesday, May 4, 2005

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You don't see Diane Ninemire doing much talking. If you're one of the lucky 600 who squeeze onto Levine-Fricke Field for a weekend softball game, you'll see the Cal head coach do a lot of standing, mostly.

She stands in the third base coaching box doing a silent impression of George C. Scott's "Patton." Without the American flag in the background, of course.

And instead of a riding crop tucked beneath her arm, she has a rolled-up dossier of scouting reports and a notarized copy of her deal with the Devil, because that's the only way anyone wins this many games.

Since taking over as coach for the Bears in 1988, the Nebraska native has won one national championship, been runner up in two more, qualified for the Women's College World Series six times in a row (eight overall), never suffered a losing season and has posted more wins—797 and counting—than any coach in any sport in Cal history.

She may not talk much, and she shows less emotion than the Terminator when on the field, but boy, does she win.

Eighteen years ago, Ninemire followed Donna Terry west to Berkeley. The two met when Ninemire was given a graduate assistantship under Terry who, while still an active player in the International Women's Professional Softball league, was the head coach of the Texas Women's University softball team.

TWU, as fate would have it, cut its softball program after Ninemire's first season under Terry, leaving her to finish her graduate program while her mentor left to coach the Puerto Rican national team.

The following summer, Terry was hired by Cal to become its next softball coach. But Terry came with a two-for-one deal.

"She called me and asked me to be her assistant coach, because I was the only one she had ever had," says Ninemire.

Over the next five years, the two became extremely close. They developed a bond beyond that of a coach and her understudy.

Then, on June 27, 1988, Terry unexpectedly passed away due to complications from hepatitis, leaving Ninemire with the cold reality—and still-warm bench spot—of being at the helm of a major Division I program.

"It hit me very hard because I had coached with her for six years, and she was a great coach," says Ninemire. "She was very hard-nosed. She was very military and very structured and I learned a lot of great things from her. I was very lucky to have had the opportunity to work for her."

Ninemire dove into her work, devoting every waking minute to making the Bears a perennial contender. And she hasn't come up for air since.

"It's not a job just eight to five. It's a 24-7 job," she says. "When I'm done at nighttime, I go home and try to watch as many games as I can so that I can listen to commentators and so I can watch their batters. I study tapes before I leave on every road trip."

Ninemire even purchased Direct TV to watch, record, break down and analyze games in every corner of the NCAA.

"Right now, I probably have a good 40 to 50 tapes of softball that I'm already preparing for the WCWS," she says.

Last season, Ninemire paid special attention to Nebraska in the final weeks before the tournament. And judging by Cal's appearance in the national title game, Nebraska didn't pose much of a problem.

"It really paid off because I knew Nebraska like the back of my hand," says Ninemire. "I knew all their hitters, I listened to the commentators, I knew the ins and outs of every player on that team."

Don't be flattered, Nebraska—you aren't special. Ninemire could make Robert DeNiro in Meet the Fockers sweat. FBI background checks have nothing on this woman.

"I do composite charts on hitters. I'll look back in my charts for the last three years on one kid," Ninemire says. "I know where every hitter has hit against us and I do composite charts so I know how many times a hitter will go to shortstop or go to left field. I know their tendencies."

And where they sleep and what kind of mileage their car gets. If you've ever played or could ever in the future play against the Bears, chances Ninemire has your DNA sample on file somewhere.

"Every Monday, I try to catch up with the weekend tapes so that I know that when we get to regionals this year, I'll know at least a few teams that we might play."

Ninemire is dedicated. She is passionate. And she isn't finished yet.

"I'd say I got about 10 years left in me. I just don't want to get so old that I can't go out there and hit groundballs. That's my biggest fear," she says.

Father Time may be the only person who can catch Ninemire and her soon-to-be 800 wins, and even he looks out of breath.



KELLY ANDERSON

On Top of Her Game

By Gary Traynham, Democrat Sports Editor
Thursday, March 24, 2005
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If it was a little noisy in the Anderson neighborhood last Friday, the laughter was just the Cal Bears softball team enjoying their annual chicken, tri-tip feast prepared by Greg and Lynn.

This marks the final season for senior Kelly Anderson, who nostalgically realizes the end to her brilliant softball career is close at hand.

Anderson (12-1) blanked Portland State on three hits before the Bears lost to Northwestern in the Capital Softball Classic earlier Friday. The tournament's final two days were rained out.

Third-ranked Cal will travel to North Carolina this week but will make a final trip to Sacramento on Wednesday, April 13, for a doubleheader against Sacramento State (1 p.m. start).

Anderson has played a major role in the Bears' greatest softball era, which includes one national championship, two runner-up finishes and another big chance this season.

"We're really good," Anderson says. "All four years we have been pretty solid, but no one respected us. Now we are getting respect because of getting to the championship three years in a row. We're all real excited about this year."

This season she senses an unusual camaraderie among the team, becoming a tighter-knit group.

"We are more cohesive than we have been. We get along better."

For the last two seasons, Anderson has been sharing the pitching with Kristina Thorson (11-2), who gave up a two-run homer with two outs in the seventh in the 2-1 Northwestern loss.

Of course, Anderson would like to pitch more but she knows the benefits of getting time off in a long season. She points to No. 1-ranked Arizona losing in the regionals a year ago, relying solely on pitcher Alicia Hollowell of Fairfield.

"That proves two are better than one," Anderson says. "If I don't get it done, then Kristina's there. If she doesn't get it done, I'm there."

Anderson is thriving in tandem with Thorson.

"When you have someone else there, it makes you better. Kristina is a riseball pitcher who works on her dropball. And I work more on my riseball. It makes us both better.

"We have a good working relationship and help each other out on the field."

With softball changing its postseason format this year to include Regionals and Super Regionals, that depth in pitching looms even more advantageous.

In between her push toward law school, Anderson stepped up her conditioning in the offseason.

"I am throwing the ball harder and with more control of my pitches. Overall, this is the best year I've had. I feel a lot stronger in my conditioning."

She pitched exceptional when the Bears (24-3) dominated on their trip to Hawaii and she appears to be getting stronger.

Thorson beat Olympian Cat Osterman and Texas, which has already dumped highly touted UCLA twice.

In her career, Anderson boasts a sparkling 67-25 (.728) win-loss record. Her highest earned run average was 1.45 as a sophomore.

Anderson shuttered at the thought she has only about two months left in her softball career, that started when she was 9 years old.

She started out pitching to her Dad, who showed plenty of patience and understood her potential.

"He hasn't been able to catch me for 10 years," Kelly says jokingly.

At the same time, that practice made it all worthwhile. She knows that Berkeley is the right place for her, feeling lucky to annually make a run at a national championship.

Part of her college education has involved adjusting to the big city.

"It was so different when I came here," she says. "You learn how to deal with a variety of people and an overpopulated city and learn how to park and get away with things and not get parking tickets.

"I don't know how many tickets I've gotten. You learn by experience. That's what life is. I love the school. I'm real happy here.

"It's a such a beautiful campus. The streets and town are just different. I love going to school here but would never live in this town when not going to school. I don't know how the people do it."

With law school looming, she took a heavy academic load in the fall and has been awaiting responses from school applications in Southern California. She is excited that Pepperdine's law school has responded affirmatively and is also looking at possibilities in San Diego.

After taking the LSAT in October, she has been sending out resumes and writing essays.

"It was a long process this fall," she says. "It was very stressful. Now I'm having an easier spring."

Yes, law school is close and softball will be something in the past.

"It's kind of sad," Anderson says of finishing her career. "This summer I'll take some vacation and do some fun things before I go to law school and be in the books the next three years."

She is contemplating entertainment or sports law.

"I want to try to do something with sports. It'll always be in my blood."

Then, she pauses, and adds, "I would like to know how many pitches I've thrown in my life."

EMILY FRIEDMAN

You Can't Win 'em All, But Softball Bears Come Close

Cathy Cockrell, Public Affairs

Tuesday, April 12, 2005

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"Home game" has a unique meaning for Berkeley native Emily Friedman, a lifelong softball fan who grew up in the Panoramic Hill neighborhood. Memorial Stadium was virtually in her backyard back then, and so was Levine-Fricke Field, home of the California softball team.

"Growing up in a college town, you're a fan of the school and the teams," says Friedman. The Golden Bears softball squad "was my team, since I was 8 or 10 years old. I'd walk down Panoramic and watch the games and the practices."

Friedman played varsity softball at Berkeley High and spent several summers in her teens on the highly competitive travel ball circuit (with the San Jose Strikers and the Stockton Runnin' Rebels), then earned a scholarship to the University of Wisconsin.

Last fall, after two years as one of the Badgers' top players, Friedman transferred to Cal and returned to Levine-Fricke Field — this time covering second base for the team she once peered at through the fence, cheered from the stands, and even served, on occasion, as bat girl. To add to the irony and excitement of it all, she's back under the guidance of Diane Ninemire — the Cal coach who taught her the game, from the ground up, in softball summer camps.

"She definitely pushes us hard," she says of Ninemire. "She cares about us as a team, and as individuals, a lot. Even at practices, she expects us to be the best."

Ninemire's high standards have paid off. In her 23 years with the Cal softball program — 18 of them as head coach — she has elevated the program to the highest level and become the "winningest" coach, male or female, in the history of Cal athletics (790 wins, 374 losses as of April 10). In the process, Ninemire has gained recognition as one of the top softball coaches in the world; last year, she served as assistant coach to the 2004 Greek Olympic softball team.

Now regarded as one of the perennial powerhouse teams, the Bears have made it to the Women's College World Series for the last six years — coming in second in 2003 and 2004 and taking the NCAA title in 2002. Six of Cal's current seniors were freshmen on that WCWS title team. This spring, on the verge of graduation, they're hungry for another trophy. So are the newer players.

"We have a whole infield full of seniors," says Friedman. "We have every single element of the game necessary to win: defense, pitching, offense, and speed."

So far, the season has brought a series of rainouts for No. 3 California, which enjoys a 35-5 record as of April 10. Ninemire, of course, is gunning for a second national title, though she's philosophical about taking it "one game at a time."

However the season pans out, she takes great pride in the fact that Cal can offer players like Friedman the "best of both worlds" — a great education and a great softball program. "Life doesn't get much better than that," she says.

DOWN THE STRETCH

No. 2 Cal Women Want It All

Bears Look Past Pac-10 to College World Series

By Michelle Smith, Chronicle Staff Writer
May 12, 2004
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The charge is straightforward enough for the No. 2-ranked Cal women's softball team in this last weekend of the regular season. Win every game.

With three Pac-10 games left before the NCAA Tournament, nothing is better for a team with national championship aspirations than a little momentum.

"You finish strong and whatever happens after that happens," said Cal coach Diane Ninemire, whose Bears team takes on No. 3 Arizona today at Strawberry Canyon, before closing the conference slate with games against last-place Arizona State on Friday and Saturday.

Cal (44-10, 11-7) is still in line for a Pac-10 title, two games behind first-place Oregon State. But the Bears, who haven't won the conference since 1987, have bigger designs.

"For me, the Pac-10 title is nice, but it doesn't mean anything if you don't get where you want to be at the end of the year," Ninemire said. Cal will make its 20th consecutive NCAA appearance, the longest streak in the Pac-10.

No. 5 Stanford (39-12, 12-6) is also NCAA-bound and in contention for its first-ever Pac-10 title, just one game behind the Beavers.

But before the Cardinal find out their tournament seeding, they must finish with Arizona State at home on Thursday and games against the Wildcats on Friday and Saturday. One more win would match Stanford's best Pac-10 win total.

Stanford has won five series against their Pac-10 opponents this season, taking two of three games from UCLA, Oregon, Oregon State, Washington and Cal. The Cardinal are 1-1 against Arizona State and 1-0 against Arizona this season.

Cal has played for five weeks without junior leftfielder Lindsay James, who sustained a broken hand against Washington on April 8. James was the team's leading hitter with a .478 average before her injury.

The Bears are hoping to re-awaken their offense this weekend in time for postseason play. Cal has scored eight runs in its last eight games. But on the mound, they are in good shape with two 20-game winners in junior Kristina Thorson (20-4, 0.99 ERA) and Kelly Anderson (23-6, 1.27 ERA).

The NCAA bracket will be determined in Sunday's selection show (4:30 p.m. on ESPN News), the women's tournament is heading into a postseason format change, similar to the men's baseball format.

The women will open the postseason on May 20 with eight, eight-team regionals, from which two teams will emerge.

The regionals will be followed by the Super Regional round, which will pit two teams in a best-of-three format, the winner heading to Oklahoma City for the College World Series. Ninemire isn't sure she likes the new format.

"I think it's going to be tough for everyone to play three straight weekends of championship ball," Ninemire said. "By the time you get to the championship game, everybody is going to be pretty exhausted. But that's why it's important to be mentally tough. We've been there before and I think that helps us."

SUPER REGIONAL

Baylor softball tests Cal, but falls in Game 3

Chad Conine, Waco Tribune-Herald
Sunday, May 29, 2005
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Baylor pushed Cal to a decisive Game 3 Saturday in the NCAA Super Regional at Gettman Stadium with a 4-1 win.

Then the Golden Bears pushed back.

Cal scored seven runs in its first two at-bats of the winner-take-all Game 3 and defeated the Lady Bears, 7-1.

With the win, Cal stamped its ticket to its seventh consecutive NCAA Softball World Series. The Golden Bears (52-13), who have been in the College World Series championship game the last three seasons, will try to win their first national championship since 2002 in Oklahoma City this week.



Baylor starting pitcher Cristin Vitek won Game 2 for the Lady Bears, but Cal rocked her early in Game 3. The Golden Bears' first four hitters smacked singles and Vitek left the contest having recorded just one out on a run-down.

Cal's early offensive surge reversed the momentum the Lady Bears (51-14) established by coming back from a 1-0 deficit to win Game 2.

A one-out single by Baylor second baseman Carrie Leerberg sparked the Lady Bears in the bottom of the sixth inning as they rallied to take control of Game 2.

Leerberg stole second and then benefited from a rule change when Tessa Lynam singled to right field. After rounding third base, Leerberg and the ball arrived at home at virtually the same time, however Cal catcher Haley Woods blocked home plate before she caught the ball, violating the obstruction rule added this season. Leerberg was awarded home plate, tying the game, 1-1.

Leerberg's run marked the first earned run scored against California starting pitcher Kelly Anderson in this postseason. She had given up only one unearned run through 31 2/3 innings during the NCAA Tournament through the sixth inning of Saturday's Game 2.

But Baylor didn't stop at one.

Lynam moved to second base on the throw home and took third on a two-out infield single by Stephanie Pomes. Kim Wilmoth walked and Emily Gipe came in to run for Pomes with the bases loaded.

Baylor catcher Melissa Huffhines followed Wilmoth and worked the count full before getting the game's deciding hit. Huffhines floated a fly ball to deep right field, over the head of Cal rightfielder Alex Sutton, driving in Lynam, Gipe and Wilmoth.

"I was looking for an outside pitch, and just kept my shoulder in and hit it," Huffhines said. "It was a good way to end my career at Baylor."

Given a three-run lead, Baylor starter Cristin Vitek allowed a leadoff single to Pamanian, but then got two fly outs and struck out Julie Meyer to end the contest.

Vicky Galindo homered to leadoff Game 2 for the Golden Bears, but then Vitek gave up only four hits the rest of the way and Baylor didn't let a Cal runner get past second base.

"Cristin kept us in the ballgame," Moore said. "Through every inning, our at-bats looked a little better. We capitalized on a big hit by Melissa."

SUPER REGIONAL

Super Cal-amity

Chad Conine, Waco Tribune-Herald
Saturday, May 28, 2005
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Facing NCAA Softball World Series perennial California, Baylor sought near-perfection in the field in its Super Regional at Getteman Stadium.

Errors, like the three the Lady Bears committed in the bottom of the third Friday night, proved costly, as Cal jumped on Baylor in a three-error third inning with three hits and four runs, effectively putting away an 8-0 Game 1 victory.

That lead was all Cal starter Kelly Anderson needed, but the Golden Bears kept scoring on the way to an 8-0 run-rule win in six innings.

"Some days everything that can go wrong does go wrong," Baylor coach Glenn Moore said. "That's why the powers that be opted for the best-two-out-of-three format."

Baylor will try to pull even with Cal in Game 2 at 1 p.m. today at Getteman Stadium. If the Lady Bears (50-13) win Game 2, the deciding game of the series would follow 30 minutes after today's initial contest. The Golden Bears (51-12) are within a win of their seventh consecutive College World Series berth. Cal has been to the championship game in each of the last three seasons and won the national title in 2002.

Unlike Baylor, which is playing for a berth in the World Series on its home field for the second consecutive season, Cal hasn't had that luxury. The Golden Bears didn't bid for a Super Regional because their home stadium doesn't meet NCAA hosting criteria.

On the road for a second straight tournament weekend, Cal had the swagger of a road-tested squad, especially as it took advantage of Baylor's moments of weakness.

After Cal starter Kelly Anderson and Baylor's Lisa Ferguson each cruised through the first two innings, Cal's Emily Friedman reached base to lead off the third when a grounder skidded away from Lady Bears' shortstop Kim Wilmoth. Two batters later, with one out, Golden Bears No. 9 hitter Alex Sutton laced a double to the left-field wall to drive in Friedman.

Baylor had a chance to get out of the third down 1-0 when Cal's Kaleo Eldredge grounded to Baylor third baseman Stephanie Pomes with two outs. But Lady Bears' first baseman Tessa Lynam couldn't handle Pomes' throw and the miscue allowed Sutton and Vicky Galindo to score,



boosting the Golden Bears' lead to 3-0. Cal made it 4-0 when Haley Woods' single to left field was mishandled by leftfielder Kylie Conroy, letting Eldredge score.

"I felt this team was ready to play," Moore said. "It kind of snowballed on the ball at first base and one thing led to another."

Baylor's Carrie Leerberg posted an infield single in the top of the first and catcher Melissa Huffhines sent a single up the middle in the top of the third off of Anderson (28-7), who hadn't given up a hit in her two previous starts.

After her offense gave her a 4-0 lead, however, Anderson (28-7) gave up just one hit and got a double play to retire the Lady Bears in order in their final three at-bats.

Both in the field and at the plate, Cal refused to give away any momentum. The Golden Bears scored three runs on three hits in the bottom of the fifth, keyed by a double by Chelsea Spencer that drove in Eldredge and Jessica Pamanian.

"No matter how many runs we score, we always play like we're down by two," Sutton said. "(Today) we'll start the game as if we're down 0-2."

Lynam moved from first base to pitcher in the fourth to relieve Ferguson (20-6), who was saddled with four unearned runs after giving up five hits. Lynam pitched the final 2 2/3 innings as the Golden Bears scored their eighth run to reach the run rule with two outs in the sixth.

Anderson went six innings for her 23rd complete game this season. She gave up just three hits and effectively kept the Lady Bears guessing, often leading batters off with two straight changeups.

"That's just part of Kelly's pitching repertoire," Cal coach Diane Ninemire said. "The key for her is to keep batters off-balance. That's the name of the game."

Cal could take a step to further keep Baylor off-balance by pitching Kristina Thorson in Game 2. Thorson has 22 wins in this campaign and has struck out a team-high 208.

Baylor's five errors in the game were a season high and it was the first time Baylor has been run-ruled this year. But Moore was confident his team would respond well today.

"We have the leadership," Moore said. "There's no need to challenge them. They've worked hard to get to this point. That loss was enough motivation, and the way we lost it."

NCAA TOURNAMENT

Bears in the Woods

Behind catcher, Cal softball's postseason lives on

Michael Silver, CNN.com

Saturday, May 28, 2005

© 2005 CNN/Sports Illustrated

The riseball headed toward Haley Woods' forehead — an impossibly deceptive pitch in an uncomfortably desperate moment — and as the junior catcher made the split-second decision to round on it, almost everyone associated with Cal softball knew the end was near. Surely this, the 10th consecutive pitch on which the Golden Bears were a strike away from elimination, would be the one to seal their fate.

Was it really going to end like this? Could it be that Cal, the second-seeded team in the NCAA softball tournament — a loaded, senior-driven squad that, in the wake of a runner-up finish in last year's Women's College World Series, had earned its first preseason No. 1 ranking — was going to be bounced from the postseason after losing its first two games at the Fresno State regional?

From my vantage point on May 20, just behind the first-base dugout at FSU's Bulldog Diamond, it sure looked that way. The Bears trailed Long Beach State by a 3-2 score with two outs in the seventh inning and runners on first and second, and Woods had battled back from a 1-2 hole to force a full count.

This was the 13th pitch of the at-bat, and she seemed merely to be postponing the inevitable. Cal had been struggling offensively for more than six weeks, and Woods, the team's biggest and most powerful hitter, stood as its most obvious symbol of futility. Smoking hot in the season's first half, she hadn't produced a big hit in forever. In this game she was 0-for-3, having been whiffed twice by Long Beach State standout senior pitcher Meredith Cervenka on eye-high riseballs nearly identical to the one she was about to swing at.

Standing in the third-base coaching box, Cal coach Diane Ninemire had a far less fatalistic attitude. The winningest coach of any sport in school history — she's 805-381 in 18 years — Ninemire is an unfailingly pleasant lady whose amiability disguises her inner fire. Several hours earlier, while dining at a Chevy's with a group of Cal officials and staff members, she had been convinced that her team, despite its stunning 3-1 defeat to BYU the previous night, would snap out of its funk and advance to the Super Regionals by winning four consecutive games over two days.

"We are a long way from done," Ninemire assured me as she poked at her chicken fajitas. "A bear is about to be awakened."

Ever the hopeful Cal devotee, I probed her for a past performance that proved this was possible. Certainly, one must have existed given the penchant for drama her teams always have seemed to display. I was finishing college when Ninemire, then a young assistant, took over the program, and back then I'd used my bully pulpit as the Daily Californian sports editor to make fun of her publicity-seeking team on more than one



occasion. But the softball Bears grew on me, and over the years I began to follow their postseason results and marvel at their ability to come through in the clutch. So many times Cal seemed to have a rough draw or found itself in a grim position, and more often than not the Bears would come through

Finally, in 2002, Ninemire's team won it all, breaking a scoreless tie with Arizona by unloading on the great Jennie Finch in the top of the seventh. Second-place finishes to UCLA in each of the next two years validated the Bears as a program that joined the Bruins and Wildcats as college softball's behemoths.

Going two-and-out in Fresno, however, would be a major step backward.

"I know you guys have pulled yourselves out of holes before," I said to Ninemire. "Give me some precedent.

"OK," she said, "in the 2001 regional at Florida State, we're playing [the Seminoles] for the championship, loser goes home. We're down 2-1 in the seventh and down to our last out — down to our last strike, because it's a full count — and Kristen Morley is at bat with a runner on second. Morley isn't hitting well; she has like one extra-base hit on the year. We're basically hoping she can just find a way to get on. Then, bam — she hits a double. The runner, Amber Phillips, charges around third, and halfway home she slips and falls on her face. So now she's crawling home and gets in just ahead of the throw — and we come back and win in extra innings."

That got everyone's juices flowing, and the conversation remained upbeat for the duration of the meal. As we got up to leave, Ninemire looked at me with a steely glare, all traces of geniality gone. "You know how they say there's a calm before the storm?" she asked defiantly. "Well, one hell of a storm is about to hit Fresno."

There were some positive rumblings during the Long Beach State game, with Cal taking leads of 1-0 and 2-1, but most of the offensive production still coming from the bottom of the order. The Bears' priceless pair of aces, Kristina Thorson and Kelly Anderson, had bailed them out of so many games over the previous six weeks — but on this day, the 49ers got to both of them and took a 3-2 lead in the bottom of the fourth. As Woods waited for that riseball, attempting to stave off extinction for the 10th consecutive time, it appeared Ninemire's hopeful prophecy had been undone by a protracted hitting epidemic among the team's most important offensive players.

Fresno State fans, eager to spare their team a meeting with the nation's second-ranked team, were openly cheering for the kill, gloating over the Bears' demise. As Woods broke her wrists, it was so over, even those of us in the Cal section who'd witnessed The Play back in 1982 were resigned to disappointment.

Then, in an instant, revival: Woods connected and, in about 0.8 seconds, sent the ball careening off the top of the wall in right-center. That was more than enough time to launch Cal's speedy baserunners, Vicky Galindo and Lindsay James, on an express trip home. Ebullient screams filled the dugout, and the stands behind it, as James crossed to give Cal a 4-3 lead. Standing at second base, Woods triumphantly took it all in while the gleeful woman sitting two seats next to me extended a hearty Bear hug. At game's end, after Thorson had retired the side in the bottom of the seventh, she finally introduced herself. "Hi," she said. "I'm Kristen Morley."

A few minutes later the Bears were back on the field for a rematch with BYU — except now, they were an entirely different team. Galindo and James, the latter player having just returned after missing six weeks with a broken hand, once again provided spunk and speed at the top of the order. Seniors Kaleo Eldredge, Jessica Pamanian and Chelsea Spencer swung freely and effectively, while 7-8-9 hitters Emily Friedman, Julie Meyer and Alex Sutton continued to shine. Woods, her vigor reestablished, marched to the plate with bravado.

This, at long last, was Cal softball. The Bears most certainly had their swagger back, with Ninemire reverting to her relentlessly aggressive coaching style. Cal scored five runs in the second — the first and last on squeeze plays — and, behind Anderson's no-hitter, mercy-ruled the Cougars, 9-0, in five innings.

The following afternoon, the Bears faced long odds once again. Fifteenth-ranked Fresno State had a huge edge in fans (though, to be fair, Cal's 60-strong contingent consistently seized the spirit advantage), and its outstanding senior pitcher, Jamie Southern, hadn't allowed an earned run in 78 innings. Further, the Bears would have to beat her and the Bulldogs twice.

In the first game, Thorson became ill in the top of the second and had to leave with two runners on, and Fresno State took a 1-0 lead before Anderson got out of the inning. But the Bears tied with a two-out rally in the fourth and went up 2-1 in the fifth on Eldredge's double down the right-field line, moving James to third with one out. With two runners in scoring position, the dangerous Woods stepped to the plate. Southern delivered — and Woods dropped a perfect squeeze bunt to score James, stunning the Bulldogs. Ninemire pumped her fist as James came charging back to hand-slap her energized teammates.

The Bears finished out the victory, switched dugouts and prepared to stave off elimination once more. With Thorson ailing and no other healthy pitcher on the staff, Anderson, the sturdy senior, would have to get it done again. Galindo, Cal's 125-pound All-American, was the game's first batter, and on a 2-2 pitch, she lifted Southern's pitch down the right-field line. The fence at Bulldog Stadium is 205 feet in the corners — 15 feet deeper than in most college stadiums — and the perky Galindo looks about as capable of clearing it as Lindsay Lohan. Yet the ball kept soaring until it cleared the fence, and as she crossed the plate, her trademark smile finally returned.

Southern battled gamely the rest of the way, limiting Cal to that sole run despite seven hits, but Anderson made sure that didn't matter. She threw her seventh career no-hitter, allowing just one ball to leave the infield, and permitted no Fresno State runner past first base.

Tears flowed freely after the game as the Bears (50-12) prepared for their next adventure. Because Cal lacks the facilities to host in the postseason, the Bears were forced to hit the road again. They'll open a best-of-three Super Regional series against another set of Bears — 15th-seeded Baylor — in Waco, Texas, Friday evening, with games 2 and 3 (if necessary) set for Saturday afternoon.

Baylor has a potent offense and should have a pronounced home-field edge, but it will encounter a team that has traveled to the abyss and lived to tell about it. Whatever goes down this weekend, the Bears always will thank their catcher for getting them out of the Woods.



FRESNO STATE REGIONAL

Anderson rescues Cal's season with dominant performance

Jay Heater, Contra Costa Times
Sunday, May 22, 2005
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FRESNO - With her national powerhouse team on the verge of collapse, Cal senior pitcher Kelly Anderson took charge.

Four victories, two no-hitters and 20-1/3 innings of scoreless pitching later, the No. 2-ranked Golden Bears (50-12) are headed to the Super Regionals with their hope of a seventh consecutive trip to the Women's College World Series still alive.

Anderson was the dominant force on Saturday as Cal swept 3-1 and 1-0 decisions from host Fresno State at Bulldog Diamond. She capped her weekend with a no-hitter in the deciding contest.

"This is a different game, where you have to take everything pitch by pitch," said Anderson, who was 4-6 in her final 10 regular season decisions. "I tried to put the pressure aside and focus on hitting my spots."

With two runners on base, nobody out and starter Kristina Thorson struggling in the second inning of the first game on Saturday, Bears coach Diane Ninemire yanked Thorson and inserted Anderson.

Although the Bulldogs (43-12) managed to pick up a run to take a 1-0 lead, all the momentum turned to Cal.

Fresno State starter Jamie Southern simply was no match for Anderson, whose record moved to 27-7 for the season. Southern, whose record dropped to 28-5 with the two losses, tried to keep Fresno State in the games, but that's a tough assignment when the opposing pitcher is untouchable.

"I felt that we were a much better team than what we showed today," said Fresno State coach Margie Wright. "What happened today was a mystery."

It was more drama than mystery for Cal, which swept four Regional games after losing the post-season opener 3-1 to BYU. The Bears, who were one out from elimination on Friday when catcher Haley Woods stroked a seventh-inning, two-run double for a 4-3 victory over Long Beach State in an elimination game, managed just enough offense to get the job done.

In the first game on Saturday, Cal designated player Emily Friedman knotted the game at 1-1 with an RBI single to center in the fourth inning.

The Bears pushed across two more runs in the fifth on an RBI double by Kaleo Eldredge that kicked up chalk just after passing directly over the first base bag and then scooted down the line. Woods followed with a perfect suicide squeeze bunt that scored Lindsay James.

The 3-1 lead was plenty for Anderson, who retired Fresno State in order in the sixth before running into a bit of trouble in the seventh. With two out, the Bulldogs put a pair of runners on base as Kristy Villasenor singled to right and Christina Clark walked. However, Anderson ended the game by getting Southern to fly out to center.

The second game started out with a bang as Cal leadoff hitter Vicky Galindo lofted a home run just barely over the fence and beyond the grasp of Fresno State right fielder Daisy Gaynor. "It was an inside pitch and I got everything behind it," said Galindo, who is a 5-foot-4, 120-pounder.

With the smallest of leads, Anderson was near perfect. She walked Fresno State catcher Nichole Willis in the first inning and designated player Shauna Johnson in the second, then didn't allow another base runner.

Anderson, who allowed two hits in 13 innings total on Saturday, was asked if the Bears came back from the dead. "I think we did," she said with a smile. "I knew I wasn't ready for it to end."

The winner of the Auburn Regional will host Cal next weekend. That victor will advance to the Women's College World Series.

THE PROGRAM

Bears getting accustomed to elite status

Michelle Smith, San Francisco Chronicle

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

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On Thursday afternoon in Strawberry Canyon, nearly 600 people gathered on a rare day of sunshine to see the second-ranked Cal women's softball team face No. 3 Arizona.

The crowd was large enough that it maxed out Cal's permanent grandstand, necessitating the rental of outfield bleachers to accommodate the overflow. And after the game, a 1-0 Cal victory, more than a dozen pre-teen girls waited a half-hour to get autographs from the Cal players.

That didn't happen a couple of years ago.

Last summer, a few Cal players — including third baseman Vicky Galindo and shortstop Chelsea Spencer — were in San Jose playing in a tournament. They decided to catch a postgame movie, and while they were standing in line for tickets, strangers turned to them and asked, "Hey, don't you guys play softball at Cal?"

That didn't used to happen, either.

"I was on one of those online forums, and somebody wrote about another team that they were not a program like Cal or UCLA or Arizona," Spencer said. "And I thought, 'Wow, we are a program like that now.' That's a big responsibility to be thought of that way, and we've got to live up to it."

Spencer knew her career at Cal would be charmed three years ago when the Bears won the program's first national championship and Cal's first NCAA title in a women's team sport. She did not assume the opportunity would come again.

It has materialized every year since then. Cal has imbedded itself among the elite softball teams with three straight appearances in the Women's College World Series final. After winning in 2002, the Bears finished as runners-up in 2003 and 2004.

Cal once again is a contender for the NCAA title as the postseason begins this week. The Bears opened the season as the nation's top-ranked team. They have fallen to No. 2 behind Michigan but seem to have all the ingredients: an experienced team with eight seniors, strong defense, an offensive game based on speed and two pitchers with more than 20 wins, each having the best season of her career.

"I think people thought that 2002 was a fluke," senior pitcher Kelly Anderson said. "That it was all (former pitcher) Jocelyn Forrest doing such a great job on the mound. But we've been there three years in a row, and that's remarkable even for top-ranked teams."

For so long, Cal was almost there. The Bears have made six straight trips to the College World Series and 12 overall. Before the 2002 title run, they hadn't finished higher than a tie for third. For all its postseason success, Cal hasn't won a title outright in the Pac-10 — widely considered the toughest softball conference in the nation — since 1987. (Cal, Arizona, Oregon State and Stanford are 2005 Pac-10 co-champions with 13-8 records).

Even Galindo, an All-American, admitted she did not think she was coming to an elite softball program when she arrived as a transfer from West Valley College after her freshman season.

"We were going to the World Series a lot, but not doing much, and before that 2002 tournament I told the team, 'Enough is enough. It's not good enough to get there. Now we need to do something,'" Cal coach Diane Ninemire said. "Now they know how it feels to win a title and how it feels to lose one. And it's made them want it more."

Now the Bears are competing not only on the field, but in recruiting circles with all the top programs: UCLA, Arizona and Texas.

"We are right in there with them," Ninemire said.

The timing of Cal's ascension has been impeccable. The Bears have gone high-profile just as the sport has become a television staple. The Women's College World Series is the best example of the increased exposure, with every game in the tournament shown over four days.

"I never thought about playing on TV when I came here," Spencer said. "I don't think, as a female athlete, you think a lot about that. It's crazy. Now I go home and people say they've seen me on TV."

Ninemire believes the exposure has benefited her program and the sport.

"The NCAA's signature women's sports are volleyball and basketball, but I think softball should be considered up there," Ninemire said. "I think we are on TV even more than the basketball teams."

Ninemire believes her program's success has given her the leverage she needs to build a new stadium. The Bears' current facility, Levine-Fricke Field, was built 10 years ago. Ninemire said she's "desperate" to replace it.

It isn't large enough for expanding crowds, has limited parking and no on-site locker rooms. The limitations disqualify the Bears from hosting NCAA tournament games, and Stanford frequently earns the opportunity of home-field advantage for early-round postseason games.

"That kind of thing impressed 18- and 19-year-old girls. You want to be able to show them a nice locker room with their jersey hanging in it," Ninemire said. "We can offer everything here, a top program, a great education. To be missing that one important piece is disappointing."



ANDERSON/THORSON

Bears softball pair a win-win

Jonathan Okanes, Contra Costa Times
Thursday, May 19, 2005
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Cal pitchers Kristina Thorson and Kelly Anderson are different, personally and on the field. But they do have one very important thing in common: winning.

Thorson and Anderson each has won 20 games in back-to-back seasons, the first time a pair of pitchers has accomplished that feat in Cal softball history. The accomplished duo leads the Bears into the NCAA Tournament, which opens today in a double-elimination regional at Fresno State.

"It's a very unique thing," Cal coach Diane Ninemire said. "Most teams just use one pitcher and put all their eggs in one basket. They hope that pitcher stays hot and doesn't get injured. Their whole season is riding on one arm. We have two great pitchers, so it gives us an advantage."

Thorson is 21-4 and leads the Pac-10 with a 1.00 ERA. Anderson is 24-7 with a 1.26 ERA. Both were named to the All-Pac-10 first team Wednesday, making Cal the only team to have two pitchers earn All-Pac-10 honors. Last year, Thorson was 28-4 with a 0.87 ERA and was named a second-team All-American. Anderson was 25-9 with a 1.43 ERA.

"We always push each other," Thorson, a junior, said. "It's a healthy competition. It's such a huge relief knowing either one of us can shut a team down."

Thorson and Anderson achieve their success in substantially different ways. Thorson uses a riseball to try to jam hitters up and in. Anderson relies heavily on a dropball.

Off the field, Anderson best sums up the differences between herself and Thorson.

"She's more the Berkeley type," Anderson said. "She has all the piercings and tattoos and a different color hair every week."

Cal's two-headed pitching monster could prove to be a substantial advantage in the postseason, when teams have to play a few days in a row. Because most of the top teams have just one dominant pitcher, not only can the heavy workload lead to fatigue, opposing hitters can start figuring her out after enough plate appearances.

It proved to be an advantage for the Bears last year, when they advanced to the championship game of the Women's College World Series before falling to UCLA for the second year in a row. Cal has played in the WCWS title game three straight years, winning the championship in 2002, the school's only national championship ever in a women's sport.

Anderson, one of eight seniors on Cal's roster, was on the NCAA title team as a freshman.

"That's more motivation for us to go into regionals and kick it up a notch," Anderson said. "Two years of 'almost there' adds to the motivation for us. We want another national championship."

The NCAA changed its postseason format this year to emulate baseball, adding a Super Regional before the World Series. The winners of this weekend's regionals will pair off in a best-of-three series the following weekend, with those winners headed to Oklahoma City for the WCWS.

The Bears, who were the preseason No. 1 team in the country, currently hold down the No. 2 seed in the tournament and are heavy favorites to get back to the WCWS. But they have one disadvantage in that they aren't able to host a regional this weekend because their facility doesn't meet NCAA requirements.

Cal opens play against BYU tonight. Fresno State and Long Beach State are the other teams in the regional.

"I love being the underdog and surprising people. It's kind of harder when the other teams are coming after you," Anderson said. "There are more teams hungry to beat us. It's tough for us, but I think it makes us a better team."