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2000 UIC Softball Outlook

22nd-ranked Flames have sights set on World Series

Feb. 2, 2000

Like most softball coaches, UIC head coach [Mike McGovern](#) enters this season with visions of leading his team to the College World Series. But unlike most coaches, McGovern's team just might have the talent and depth to pull it off.

The Flames are coming off a 67-17 season in which they tied the all-time NCAA record for wins in a season, advancing to the NCAA Championship Tournament for the second year in a row and for the fourth time in six seasons. It was also the sixth time in seven years that UIC has won at least 50 games.

Now, with every significant player returning from last year's record-breaking squad, the stage is set for the Flames to make a run at school's second-ever berth in the College World Series.

"Our goal every year is to win it all," McGovern said. "But it certainly won't be easy. We need to learn and progress as we continue through our schedule. We have targets along the road that we need to hit. If we can hit those, we can put ourselves in a position to scope in on our final target -- the College World Series."

One of the most obvious "targets" for the Flames will be to again win the Midwestern Collegiate Conference. UIC has dominated the MCC since it joined the league in 1995, compiling a 63-5 regular season conference record while winning the last four league titles. Last year, the Flames tore through the MCC with an 11-1 regular-season record before pounding Wisconsin-Green Bay, 13-3, in the league championship game. This season, UIC again figures to be the odds-on favorite in the MCC heading into the 2000 season.

Pitching

The Flames pitching staff boasts one of the top rotations in the country.

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Amber Stachura and the Flames are poised for big things in 2000.



The staff is headlined by two-time NFCA All-American [Samantha Luli](#), who has been honored as both the MCC Pitcher and Player of the Year for the past two seasons. Last season saw her compile an astounding 39-8 record along with four saves, 366 strikeouts and a 1.12 ERA.

Heading into the 2000 season, the right-hander is the all-time leader in four of UIC's eight career pitching category and could finish the season as the leader in all eight. She is currently the school's all-time leader in wins (86), saves (7), shutouts (46) and strikeouts (851).

"Samantha is the best of the many outstanding pitchers that we have had here at UIC over the years," McGovern said. "Her All-American status is a testament to the type of athlete she is. It's certainly an honor for both her and for our program."

But Luli isn't the only capable pitcher on the UIC roster. Sophomore [Rory Gonzales-Gould](#) stepped in nicely last season as the team's No. 2 pitcher, crafting a 24-6 record while recording 95 strikeouts and a 1.91 ERA. After transferring to UIC, Gonzales-Gould first saw action for the Flames last season during her sophomore campaign, where her 24 wins set a school record for wins by a newcomer. She tossed her first career no-hitter in an 8-0 win against UNC Charlotte on March 28.

Sophomore [Maral Binnebose](#) will provide some added depth after going 1-0 as a freshman.

Infield

The Flames return enough talent on the field to possibly match -- if not exceed -- last season's win total.

When she's not on the mound, look for Luli to share first-base duties with fellow seniors [Kathy Casey](#) and [Gina Arnold](#). Luli is just as competent at the plate as she is on the mound, batting .293 last season while leading the team with 11 home runs. McGovern calls Casey the team's "top defensive first-baseman" while Arnold will split time between first base and catcher.

Arnold was fourth on the team in batting last season (.331) and led the team with 12 stolen bases. Casey hit .252 with eight RBI.

Second-baseman [Julie Bumgardner](#) is one of the team's top returnees from last season. A second-team All-MCC selection and named to the MCC All-Tournament team, she batted .314 in 1999 while driving in 48 RBI. Freshman [Emily Hallmann](#) will be asked to back up Bumgardner at second base.

Sophomore [Edel Leyden](#) led the team in hitting last season (.398) and is expected to get the start at third base. She will likely be backed up by sophomore [Kelly Chenoweth](#).

Junior [Stefanie Christoferson](#) should hold down the catching duties again this season after finishing 1999 as the team leader in RBI (54) and second in batting (.347). When she's not behind the plate, look for her Arnold and senior [Emily Webster](#).

Rounding out the infield will be sophomore shortstop [Jennifer Tiffany](#). She batted .332 last season, good enough for third on the team. She was named to both the MCC First -Team and All-Newcomer squads. [Amy Gonzales](#) will back her up.

Outfield

Junior centerfielder [Abby Booth](#) has one of the top arms in UIC's history and highlights the Flames' outfield lineup. She missed 13 games last season because of a fractured wrist but returned to the lineup in time for the postseason. She was named to the NCAA Regional All-Tournament team after batting .500 (4-for-8) with a home run and two RBI in UIC's four NCAA contests.

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Junior [Molly Freeman](#) will be in the outfield mix as well after earning First Team All-MCC honors in 1999. She is coming off a season in which she hit .277 while knocking in 37 RBI. She will be joined in the outfield by sophomore [Amber Stachura](#), who set an MCC Championship record with 6 RBI in UIC's 13-3 victory last season in the league title game. Hallmann could wind up in left field when she is not at second base.

Schedule

The Flames will again tackle one of the nation's most ambitious schedules. UIC will play in eight different in-season tournaments at locations ranging from San Diego to Dallas to Tampa.

In addition to scheduled games against national powers Massachusetts, North Carolina and DePaul, more than half of last season's Top 25 teams loom as possible in-season tournament opponents for the Flames. Potential in-season tournament matchups include Washington, Fresno State, Oregon State, Oklahoma State and Florida, just to name a few.

"We definitely have a tough schedule lined up for us this season," McGovern said. "But, by playing in all these tournaments against all these top teams, we learn how to succeed in a tournament atmosphere. It also gives us a chance to fine-tune our lineup and work on strategies so that we can be in top shape heading into the NCAA Tournament at the end of the season."

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