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BACK IN THE SWING OF THINGS

WCJC Pioneers baseball team opens 2017 season

WHARTON, TEXAS – The Wharton County Junior College Pioneers baseball team hopes to build upon the momentum it generated last year as it opens a new season and sets its sights on the National Junior College Athletic Association World Series this coming June.

The Pioneers just missed a trip to the NJCAA World Series in 2016, coming up short in the championship game against San Jacinto. WCJC Baseball Coach Keith Case, now in his fourth year, plans to better that result this season and guide his players all the way to the big game. But to accomplish that goal, he will have to overcome some daunting challenges – namely, a tough schedule and an inexperienced team.

The Pioneers opened the season on Jan. 31 with a home game against Coastal Bend College, splitting a doubleheader, 2-4, 5-3. They are currently 5-6 on the season and open conference play this Thursday, Feb. 23, against long-time rival Blinn College at Tiger Field.

Adjusting to the rigors of top-level play will be an adjustment for the majority of the team considering that the Pioneers lost many of their key veterans to graduation last year. Case will rely upon a small cadre of returning sophomores to set the pace and provide leadership.

“We’re trying to follow up the success we had last year, but a lot of the guys are gone,” Case said. “We’ve got a lot of new faces.”

On the mound Case will lean heavily on sophomore David Leal, a 6-foot-5-inch left hander from Houston who provides the Pioneers with plenty of power. Leal has already signed to play ball with Louisiana Tech University after he wraps up this season.

Case said he is still working out the rest of his bullpen – as well as some of the other key positions – and is keeping his fingers crossed that there are no major injuries. With so few veterans, an injury or two could prove significant.

Despite the challenges, Case is pleased with what he saw in the off-season and believes the Pioneers have a real chance for a winning season. He said last year's team started slow before picking up momentum and surging ahead.

“Our team chemistry is good and I like the way our guys are approaching the work that has to be done,” he said. “Last year’s team was mentally strong and we need to get to that point. But we’ve got some players that are up to that task and can really play the game.”

For more information on the WCJC Pioneers baseball team and their 2017 schedule, visit the college’s website at: www.wcjc.edu

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