



Washington State Head Coach Sherri Murrell enters her fifth season at the helm of the Cougar women's basketball program with great expectations for the 2006-07 season.

"This is the year," Murrell says. "I feel like the team chemistry we had last year was amazing and it kept us together during the most adverse times. As a staff, we feel like we have the right people in place and that's key. Now it's just a matter of being confident."

The 2005-06 Cougars continued their steady improvement under Murrell's leadership registering the most wins since the 2000-01 campaign while recording an impressive 6 and 2 record in non-conference play.

The past two seasons have seen the Cougars involved in 17 separate games decided by 6 points or less. WSU has cut its scoring margin during Murrell's tenure by 33 percent and has established single digit marks in each of the past two years.

Murrell begins the 2006-07 campaign intent on pushing her team to achieve beyond the early success of last season, carrying that momentum into Pac-10 Conference play and ultimately the postseason.

"We had the goal last year of winning more games in the non-conference part of our schedule and that happened," Murrell states. "Now it's win the same amount or more and keep moving forward to get more wins in the Pac-10. Our goal is to move at least halfway up the Pac-10 ladder and compete to put ourselves in position for postseason play."

The 2006-07 Cougars are a youthful group anchored by the senior leadership of Kate Benz and Adriane Ferguson.

Benz claimed the Pac-10 Conference rebounding title in 2006, earning the honor for the second consecutive season averaging 9.1 rebounds a game. The Portland, Ore., native also garnered Pac-10 Player of the Week honors for the week of Feb. 20, the first such recognition in nine years for a Cougar player. Benz earned her second All-Pac-10 honorable mention nod in 2006 as well her second consecutive Pac-10 All-Academic first team selection.

The 6-foot-2 forward averaged 9.9 points last season and tallied seven double-doubles, increasing her career total to 18. Benz pulled down 255 total rebounds (9.1/

game) bringing her career total to 696 and ranking her fourth on the WSU rebounding list.

Ferguson, who sat out much of last season with a broken finger, looks to return to form as a versatile scoring threat for the Cougars. The Spokane, native who ranks seventh on the WSU all-time career free-throw percentage list at 75 percent, averaged 3.6 points and 2.9 rebounds in just 16 games played in 2006.

"Kate and Adriane are in the best shape I have ever seen," Murrell says. "They have each worked extremely hard on improving their games and I know we can expect great things from them this season."

Backing up the senior leaders are a group of six returners made up of junior Dani Montgomery and a group of five sophomores that made significant contributions last season.

Montgomery saw action in every game before suffering multiple fractures in her right hand during the early moments of the game at California. Prior to her injury, the 5-foot-11 guard was averaging 3.6 points and 1.7 rebounds.

"My wish is for Dani to have an injury free season so she can showcase her talent," Murrell says. "She has worked diligently to become more of an offensive threat to add to her already tenacious defense."

Katie Appleton was one of three Cougars to appear in every game, making 25 starts as a true freshman. The 5-foot-8 guard shot .373 from beyond the arc, ranking her seventh in the Pac-10 and eighth in conference in 3-point field goals made per game (1.79). The product out of Big Bear, Calif., averaged 8.5 points and 3.3 rebounds per game, posting double-digit outings 11 times, including a career high 20 points at Boise State Dec. 4 (2005).

Appleton knocked down 50 treys, as did fellow freshman Amanda DuRocher with the duo combining to set the freshman 3-pointer made mark at 100, besting the previous total of 91 set in 1996-97 (Smith-69; Ludwicki-22).

DuRocher earned 2006 All-Pac-10 Freshman Honorable Mention honors, starting 18 games in her first campaign as a Cougar. The Spanaway, Wash., native ranked seventh in the Pac-10 in 3-pointers made (1.85/game), recording 13 double-

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digit scoring efforts. The 5-foot-9 guard averaged 8.2 points per game and shot .323 from the field, putting up a career-high 20 points twice, at UCLA, Jan. 14, and at Washington, Feb. 5.

A trio of post players, Ebonee Coates, Heather Molzen and Sabrina Shired, round out the Cougar returnees.

Coates made five starts and appeared in all 28 games for Washington State as a true freshman. The 6-foot-3, Tacoma, Wash., native pulled down 87 rebounds and posted 22 blocks. Coates record her first career double-digit scoring game came against Arizona State, Jan. 26, with 10 points.

Molzen appeared in 17 contests for the Cougars, totaling 28 rebounds, six blocks and four steals in 120 minutes of play. The Lakeside, Calif., native pulled down a career-high seven rebounds at Hawaii, Nov 25.

Shired earned her first career start at Minnesota, Dec. 10 and appeared in 20 games. The 6-foot-4 center posted 31 rebounds and seven blocks. The Petaluma, Calif., native tallied a career-high 9 points and pulled down five rebounds at Boise State, Dec. 4.

"With the combination of Ebonee's athleticism, Heather's strength, and Sabrina's size, we will have lot of weapons to use in the paint," Murrell says. "With the graduation of Keisha Moore and a year of experience under all of their belts, I expect all three to jump at the opportunity to contribute at the post position."

In addition to the eight returners, the Cougars welcome five newcomers to the 2006-07 squad.

Colleen Betteridge, a 5-foot-9 guard, comes to WSU from Bellevue, Wash. In her senior season at Chief Sealth High School, Betteridge led the USA Today's ninth ranked CSHS team to an undefeated season (29-0), averaging 11.0 points, 6.0 assists and 2.0 steals per outing. Betteridge was also a McDonald's All-American nominee.

Nakejia Kelly, a 5-foot-7 guard from Springfield, N.Y., joins the Cougars after a stellar senior season at Notre Dame Prep where she averaged 16 points and 6.0 assists per game. Kelly is a two-time Street and Smith Honorable Mention All-American selection and was nominated as

a 2006 McDonald's Top 100 All-American while playing for the renowned Christ the King High School program in New York. She also played on the 2003 Nike/Blue Start Select Team that represented USA and won the Reze International Championship in Paris, France.

Alexa Price, a 5-foot-8 guard, comes to WSU from Culver City, Calif. In her senior season at Los Angeles High School, Price was named the 2005-06 California Northern League co-MVP and led the city in scoring, averaging 28.8 points per game. She earned first team all-city honors and was named the LHS team MVP.

Jamie Roupp comes to WSU from Ashland High School in Ashland, Ore. The 5-foot-9 guard earned Southern Oregon Conference Player of the Year honors in her senior season and was named second team All-State. She averaged 15.4 points, 5.8 rebounds, 5.3 assists and 3.4 steals per game and was nominated as a McDonald's All-American and as a Wendy's High School Heisman candidate.

Marissa Stotler, a 6-foot-1 forward from Chandler, Ariz., comes to the WSU from Dobson High School. The McDonald's All-American nominee earned first team All-State and all-region honors in her senior season. Stotler led the state in rebounding (13/game) and averaged 19.6 points, 3.2 blocks and 2.1 assists per game.

"This recruiting class is very talented and extremely athletic," Murrell enthused. "We really focused on bringing in a lot of athleticism and it is a group of young individuals that all played for top teams and have succeeded at the top level of high school basketball. It's the 39th ranked recruiting class in the nation by the Blue Star Report, and they're a gifted group that I'm very excited about."

With a schedule highlighted by a trip to the Women's Sports Foundation Classic in Lexington, Ky., and populated by a host of tough Pac-10 opponents, Murrell is excited about the opportunity to excel in the 2006-07 season.

"I look for this season to be the best we've had since I've been at WSU," Murrell says. "We've got two four-year seniors leading the way, including the Pac-10's top rebounder. Add to that a seasoned sophomore class that saw a lot of playing time last year and our talented freshman class and I see the potential for our best season yet."



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