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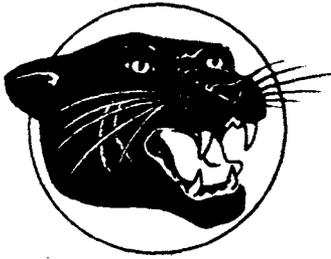
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Panther Sports News

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, Charleston, IL 61920

DAVID KIDWELL, *Sports Information Director*

OFFICE: (217) 581-2920

HOME: (217) 345-4166

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL--With its top five hitters batting over .300, Eastern Illinois University's softball team will compete in the first Gateway Collegiate Athletic Conference tournament in Macomb Thursday through Saturday (May 5-7).

The Lady Panthers, seeded third in this year's event, face Western Illinois Thursday at 12:30 p.m. Should EIU defeat WIU it would then meet the Indiana State-Northern Iowa victor Friday at 1 p.m. If EIU should lose it would then meet either Bradley, Wichita State, Indiana State or Northern Iowa in the consolation bracket of the double-elimination tourney at 7 p.m. Thursday.

EIU, coming off a doubleheader sweep at Missouri-St. Louis Monday, is 18-8 for the year winning 10 of its last 11.

Eastern is led at the plate by senior All-American candidate Nancy Kassebaum (Belle-ville-East). Kassebaum's .433 average (39-90) ranks her near the top in conference rankings. She leads the team in doubles with eight.

Mary Tiegs (Lake Bluff-Libertyville) is hitting .379 (33-87) and leads EIU with 11 steals being caught just once all season. She also leads in RBIs with 19.

Kelly Waldrup (Coulterville), a 1982 AIAW II All-American, is Eastern's third-leading hitter with a .313 average (25-80). The senior starting catcher just took the team's leadership in triples (4) with two against Missouri-St. Louis on Monday. She is tied for third in RBIs (11).

"We are very pleased to have been seeded third," Coach Deanna D'Abbraccio said. "We are looking forward to competing with some of the best this weekend.

"We feel we've not yet been tested," D'Abbraccio continued. "Without rainouts, we would be able to evaluate ourselves differently. We were able to get in two games on Monday and those definitely will help us prepare for the conference tournament.

"Our defense the last few games has been near perfect (just four miscues in last seven

games). Everyone executed well at Missouri-St. Louis," D'Abbraccio said.

Eastern's other .300-plus hitters are Tammi Rettig (Bloomington) at .312 (24-77), Kathy Trnka (Algonquin-Jacobs) at .323 (20-62) and Sharon Cizek (Lyons-Morton West) at .311 (14-45).

The Lady Panthers are led in pitching by Donna Ridgway (Annapolis) and Kathy Richards (Pittsfield), each with 8-3 records. Ridgway's earned run average of 1.03 (12 earned runs in 81 2/3 innings) leads this category. Richards has a 1.40 ERA (16 earned runs in 80 1/3 innings). Sandy Muskopf (Belleville-West) is the third member of the trio and has a 3.62 ERA (10 earned runs in 19 1/3 innings), lowering that from a 5.11 mark with her 4-2 win over UMSL in the second game.