



Rondon a Central bright spot

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CHAMPAIGN – At 2-11, Champaign Central hasn't enjoyed a quick start to the softball season.

Except behind the plate.

Catcher Monica Rondon's 19 hits, 17 RBI and seven runs lead the team. The junior has belted the only four home runs the Maroons have hit this season, and her .487 batting average is second to Carissa Hoyne's .526 clip.

"She's just done an amazing job this year," Central coach Barbara Cekander Nussmeyer said. "She has definitely exceeded my expectations this year."

The Maroons haven't had a winning season since 1995. Before Nussmeyer, a 2002 Centennial graduate, took over the program last season, Central had six different head coaches in six years.

"Coming back with a coach who already knows you as a player and already has an idea of what she's expecting just helps us to start off on the right foot," Rondon said. "Instead of having to ask, 'Can you do this? Can you do that?' she already knows what we're doing and she knows where to start and to make us work."

The hope is younger players in the program recognize the example Rondon is setting and strive to reach her level.

"She always wants to help and always is trying to better the program. She's at everything, trying to get girls to come out," Nussmeyer said. "There are a couple of freshmen right now, one in particular (McKenzie Coleman), who are already striving to be like her. If we can get that kind of stuff to continue, I definitely think it can help build this program to where we want it to be."

Rondon is a softball junkie. She plays with traveling teams in the summer and fall run by Schlarman coach Randy Skaggs and spends her winters playing indoor tournaments. To say she has a passion for the game would be an understatement. Getting her teammates to share that passion has been a challenge – one she doesn't mind taking on.

"I know I can't make someone have the same passion for it as me; I can't blame them for not loving what I love," Rondon said. "I'm always trying to be positive. I try not to get down on the girls and try to help everybody out while I do it. I can see things starting to come together for some of them."

Nussmeyer is dreading the day when she has to bid Rondon farewell. And she hopes when she says goodbye that her star player will continue her softball career at the next level.

"We'll get her somewhere," Nussmeyer said. "I think she wants to play at the D-I level. If she keeps working hard at it, we'll get her there."

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