

BY LANCE FLEMING

Defense lineman Devian Mims was named first-team all-conference.

Digest

Lively named first team all-America, joined in Cactus Bowl by Freeman

ACU senior offensive tackle **Britt Lively** ('04) was named first team all-America by the American Football Coaches' Association, Associated Press and Dopke.com College Sports Report.

Lively, a three-year starter on the offensive line for the Wildcats, is the 22nd player in ACU football history to be named first team all-America.

Lively and senior quarterback **Colby Freeman** ('04) will represent ACU in the Whataburger Cactus Bowl (NCAA Division II all-star game) Jan. 9 in Kingville.

Six to enter Sports Hall of Fame

Six former Wildcat greats have been selected for induction Feb. 21 to the ACU Sports Hall of Fame.

Randall Moore ('80) will be joined in the 2004 induction class by the late **Kelly Kent**, former volleyball and track and field standout **Stacy (Atkinson '86) Meyers**, former basketball player and coach **Deonna (Moore '86) Shake**, former coach and administrator **Dr. Dwain Hart** and longtime booster **Rex Klepper** ('49).

Moore is the third-leading scorer in men's basketball history with 1,698 points. He was a four-time all-Lone Star Conference honoree, including twice to the first team.

Shake was part of eight of the Wildcats' nine conference titles as either a player or a coach. A three-time first team all-conference player, she scored 1,287 points in her career.

Kent might be the school's all-time leading rusher if he hadn't tragically died prior to the 1979 season. He led the Wildcats to the NAIA Division I national championship in 1977, and rushed for 2,124 yards in his three-year career.

Meyers was one of the best volleyball players in school history, as well as a multi-talented athlete on the track. She was a two-time first team all-LSC player in volleyball, a two-time LSC champion in track and field and two-time all-America. She still holds the school record in the heptathlon.

Hart served as the Wildcats' tennis coach from 1956-71, compiling a record of 168-101. He also served as women's director of athletics for five years and was chair of the Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation for 22 years.

Klepper is this year's Lifetime Achievement Award recipient. A longtime booster of ACU athletics, he continues to play in the ACU alumni baseball games each year at nearly 80 years of age.

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Stingy defense paces football team during winning season

It's no coincidence that ACU's ascent back to the top of the Lone Star Conference has coincided with the revival of the Wildcats' defense during the last two seasons.

The Wildcats' 6-4 finish in 2003 was their second-straight such record, and both seasons have had as much to do with

improved defensive play as anything. ACU finished second to Texas A&M-Kingsville in the LSC South, losing the division "championship game" 10-3 at home, the second straight year ACU has lost to the Javelinas by seven points or less.

The Wildcats gave up 17 points or less in six games during the 2003 season, and the defense allowed just 298.8 yards per game, almost 75 per game less than in 2002.

ACU's defense also allowed just 190 points on the season, including



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98 in three games (30 to Central Arkansas, 41 to Tarleton State and 27 to West Texas A&M). In ACU's other seven games, the defense gave up just 92 points (13.1 per game).

"Our defense was very good through most of the season," said Gary Gaines, who is 16-25 in four seasons as the Wildcats' head coach, but 13-8 in ACU's last 21 games. "We struggled a little bit early in the season, but those guys really carried this team after the third week of the season."

All-LSC South Division senior defensive end Brad Walton (a league-best nine sacks) and defensive back Danical Manning (LSC South Freshman of the Year) led the defensive effort.

Walton anchored a pass rush that finished with an LSC-best 31 sacks on the season. Manning picked off a team-best six passes, and also was a threat on offense and special teams.

Manning caught six passes for 191 yards and two scores, and also returned 30 kicks (punts and kickoffs combined) for 462 yards and one touchdown (a 97-yard kickoff return for a score).

Offensively the Wildcats were hit hard by injuries with several players – including senior quarterback Colby Freeman, senior running back Richard Whitaker and offensive lineman Cody Savage and Cody Stewart – missing significant playing time.

"I've never been a part of a team that lost so many players to injury in one season," Gaines said. "But I was proud of the way some of our younger players and backups stepped in and played when needed."

"We're all looking forward to getting back on the field next season and seeing if we can take another step forward," he said. ▲



Britt Lively

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Volleyball team finishes 25-11; eyes strong 2004

Brek Horn said before the 2003 volleyball season that her fifth ACU volleyball team could be the one to knock West Texas A&M from its perch atop the Lone Star Conference.

While that didn't happen, make no mistake about this: the Wildcats have the components returning during the next two seasons to win the school's first LSC volleyball title.

"We played really well in stretches, but we couldn't put things together at the end of the season to make a run at the conference title," said Horn, who was named the LSC South Division Coach of the Year after her team finished 25-11 and second in the LSC South. "But I'm really excited about the players we have coming back next year, and again our goal will be to win the conference title and make the regional tournament."

The Wildcats will return nine players who competed in at least 69 games in 2003, including outside hitter **Michelle Bernhardt**, middle blocker **Amanda Slate**, middle blocker **Ashlee Motola**, rightside hitter **Sophia Kindred**, outside hitter **Nicole Killebrew**, setters **Lindsey Martin** and **Malia Plumlee**, libero **Kellen Morrow** and outside hitter **Rachel Talley**. Only Morrow and Kindred will be seniors

among that group, giving the Wildcats hope that both the 2004 and 2005 seasons could be among the best in school history.

Bernhardt had an especially outstanding season, racking up 623 kills, the second-highest single-season total in school history on her way to earning first team all-LSC South Division honors.

Slate (382 kills, 151 blocks, 126 digs) also was named first team all-LSC. Senior **Haylee Hartline** was named second team, while Morrow and Martin were named second team all-LSC South. ▲



Michelle Bernhardt

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Men's and women's basketball teams off to up-and-down starts to 2003-04 season

The ACU men's and women's basketball teams share a number of similarities early in the 2003-04 season.

Both teams expect to compete for the Lone Star Conference South Division championship and reach the LSC Post-Season Tournament. They're both also off to up-and-down starts.

The ACU men won their first four games of the season by an average of 25 points per game, but lost a pair of LSC crossover games to Southeastern Oklahoma State and East Central before finishing the fall semester portion of the schedule at 7-2 after wins over Dallas Christian, St. Edward's and Rhema College.

At 7-2, the men are off to their best start since the 1999-2000 Wildcats started the season 5-4.

"I think we've shown some flashes of being a pretty good basketball team," said ACU's second-year head coach, **Klint Pleasant**. "Even in our two losses, I thought we played well enough to win both games. We haven't been as strong on the glass (rebounding) as we need to be, and that's something that will have to get better if we want to compete for the LSC South Division championship."

Pleasant, though, has been pleased with the way the new faces on this year's roster (eight in all) have blended with the returnees from last year.

"I thought before the season started that it might take us a while to get everyone on the same page, and that's the process we've gone through in these first nine games," Pleasant said. "I believe, though, that our guys are growing more and more comfortable playing together, and I believe we'll have a great chemistry when we hit conference play in January."

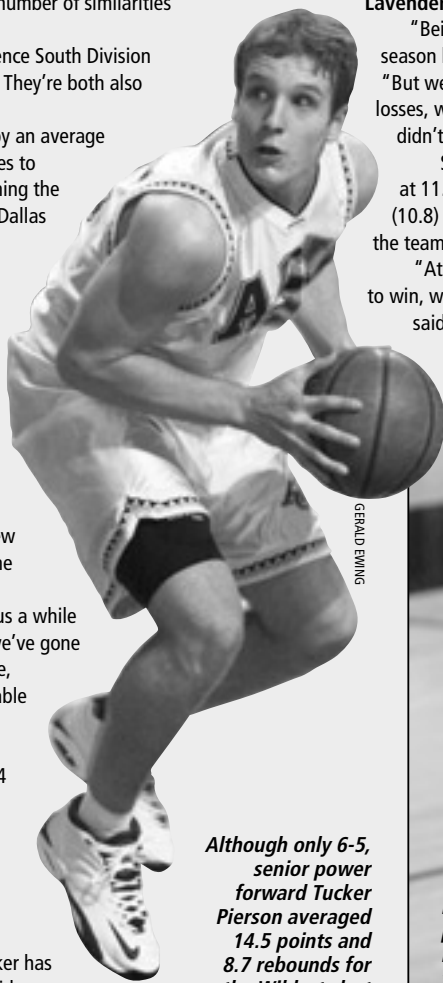
Tucker Pierson leads the team with 14.8 points and 9.4 rebounds per game. Junior transfer guard **David Baxter** averages 14.7 points per game, while senior guard **Rodney Lee** averages 12.8 points per game. Lee is shooting 38.9 percent from 3-point range (21 of 54) and needs to make 56 more 3-pointers this season to break the school's record for most in a career.

"We definitely have some guys who can score, and Tucker has done a nice job underneath in the early going," Pleasant said. "We've got to be a little bit more consistent and give Tucker more help on the boards, and we'll be fine."

On the women's side, the Wildcats have been on the road since the season started and didn't play their first game at Moody Coliseum until they hosted Cameron Jan. 3 in an LSC crossover game.

The Wildcats were picked to finish third in the LSC South Division, and sit at 4-4 on the season after playing their first eight games on the road. ACU put the finishing touches on that road stretch with wins over St. Mary's and Tarleton State at the Angelo State Clasisc on Dec. 15-16.

ACU's road stretch has taken its toll on the Wildcats in **Shawna**



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Although only 6-5, senior power forward Tucker Pierson averaged 14.5 points and 8.7 rebounds for the Wildcats last season, posting 10 double-doubles.

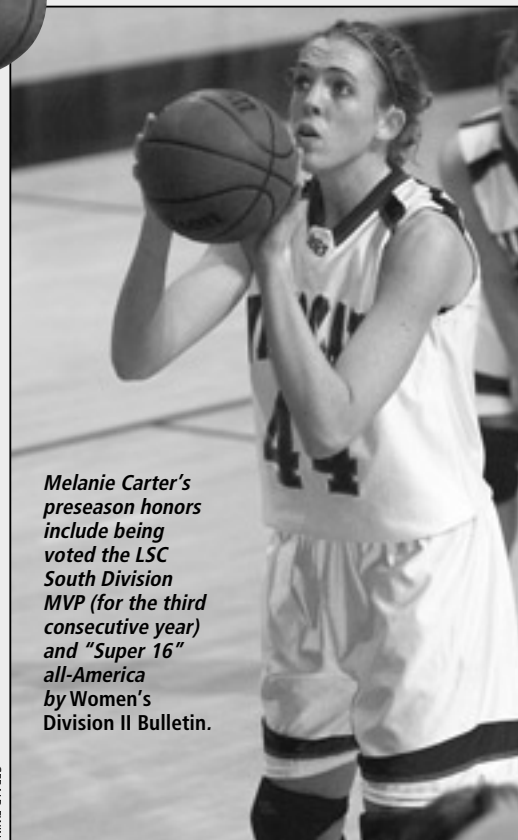
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Lavender's first full season as head coach.

"Being on the road as much as we have been early in the season has been tough physically and emotionally," Lavender said. "But we're not using that as an excuse. If you look at some of our losses, we probably should have won a couple of them, but we just didn't make the plays we needed to make at the end."

Senior forward **Melanie Carter** leads her team in scoring at 11.2 points per game, followed by senior center **Lynsie Blau** (10.8) and senior point guard **Jenny Jackson** (10.2). Blau leads the team in rebounding at 10.8 per game, while Carter averages 7.5.

"At the end of that long road stretch, we started finding ways to win, which is what you have to do to be successful," Lavender said. "I think the girls started to get a better understanding of the new system and some of the things we've been talking about. I believe we're getting better every day and that the girls are starting to find their groove."▲



Melanie Carter's preseason honors include being voted the LSC South Division MVP (for the third consecutive year) and "Super 16" all-America by Women's Division II Bulletin.

Cross country men finish second at NCAA; women show improvement

The ACU men's cross country ran its fourth straight second-place finish at the NCAA Division II national championship meet in November.

The Wildcats, who were ranked No. 3 in the nation going into the meet, finished behind national champion Adams State (Colo.) and ahead of third-place Harding (Ark.).

Junior Bernard Manirakiza picked up where predecessors Alfred

Rugema ('03) and John Kemboi ('02) left off, winning Lone Star Conference and NCAA South Central Region titles (and leading ACU to team titles along the way) on his way to finishing fifth in the individual race at the national championship meet.

Manirakiza led five Wildcats to all-America honors as Martin O'Kello finished seventh, Arthemion Sindayigaya 10th, Jean-Marie Ndukimana 25th and Nick Branen 26th.

During the regular season, the Wildcats were rarely challenged when running on the NCAA Division II level as they won their own meet



Manirakiza



Nahimana

and the conference regional titles. ACU's LSC championship was its 12th straight, and Manirakiza's individual win marked the 12th consecutive year a Wildcat has captured the race.

The Wildcats finished fifth in the team race at Oklahoma State and fourth at Arkansas.

On the women's side, Justine Nahimana capped her ACU career by finishing 23rd at the national meet to earn all-America honors for the second time.

Yuliya Stashkiv led the women to a solid season by winning both the conference and regional individual championships.

ACU won its third straight LSC title, and its third-place team finish at the regional meet was its second straight at the meet.

Stashkiv, Nahimana, Abbie Waters and Crystal Berndt were named all-LSC, and Stashkiv and Nahimana earned all-region honors.▲

Wildcats' spring sports teams looking for more trophies, championships, success

It's tough to keep ACU track and field coach **Jon Murray** from smiling these days. After all, the man is trying to decide where to showcase some of the national championship hardware he expects his men and women to win in 2004.

The men's team, which has four straight NCAA Division II national titles (indoor and outdoor in 2002 and 2003), returns three former national champions, including distance runner **Bernard Manirakiza**, who should be favored to win multiple events at both the indoor and outdoor meets in the spring.

Manirakiza won the 800 meters at last year's indoor national championship meet before winning both the 800 meters and 1500 meters outdoors. Also returning to the Wildcats is reigning outdoor triple jump champion **Ben Washington** and 2002 outdoor shot put champion **Manuel Brandeborn**.

Senior sprinter **Christie VanWyk** – who could compete in his second Olympic Games next summer for his native Namibia – returns for his final season of running the 60 meters indoors and the 100 meters, 200 meters and 4x100 relay outdoors. VanWyk finished second in the 60 at last year's indoor championship meet.

The ACU women's team has won more national track and field titles (21) than any other school in NCAA Division II has won in all sports combined, but it hasn't earned one since winning the indoor crown in 2001.

That could change this season with the return of several top performers from last year, as well as the addition of one of the world's top heptathletes.

Returning for the Wildcats will be junior pole vaulters **Katie Eckley** and **Val Gorter**, who finished first and second, respectively, at the NCAA Division II outdoor championship meet in May. Also returning, among others, is sprinter/quartermiler **Sofi Hildenborg**.

Murray also will welcome new additions in sprinters **Waffa Taissir** of Casablanca and sisters **Brooklyn** and **Jessica Hunt** of Garland, as well as heptathlete **Liga Klavina** of Latvia, who is ranked 24th in the world.

The ACU baseball team hasn't had to do much re-building over the last several years, but, coming off the school's first appearance in the NCAA Division II College World Series, that is exactly the job facing eighth-year head coach **Britt Bonneau**.

The Wildcats lost virtually all of their offense and their top three pitchers from last year's team and return just two of the team's 13 all-Lone Star Conference players from 2003.

And before the season started, pitchers **Justin Whitlock** (seven saves, MVP of the LSC Post-Season Tournament) and **Kade Simmons** (honorable mention all-LSC South Division) each had arm surgery, knocking each out for the entire season.

Bonneau will welcome 22 new faces when the Wildcats report back to campus Jan. 7 to prepare for the Jan. 31 season-opener against St. Edward's in Austin.

Junior third baseman **Ryan Barker** (.317, 8 HR, 64 RBI in 2003) is the team's returning headliner, and, Barker and senior rightfielder **Brian Johnson** (.339, 1 HR, 19 RBI) are the only two returning everyday starters to the team. Starting pitchers **Ben Brockman** (1-3, 4.70 ERA) and **Sam Hall** (6-3, 5.05 ERA) and relief pitcher **Aaron Lawler** (9-4, 3.61 ERA) also return to the Wildcats.

The top newcomers include centerfielder **Dan Gubbels**, first baseman **Chris Gaw**, pitcher **Coy Polk** and catcher **J-Bob Thomas**.

ACU first-year head golf coach **Mike Campbell** ('91) knows that getting the Wildcats' golf program back to its accustomed spot at or near the top of the LSC won't happen overnight. But Campbell, taking over for Vince Jarrett who left in July to return to his alma mater at the University of Houston after 18 seasons at ACU, knows the way to the top.

Campbell, who played for ACU's 1991 LSC championship squad, will take a young and inexperienced team into the 2004 spring season after four of the team's top five players from last year ran out of eligibility.

The only one of the top five returning is **Pierre Goethals**, who qualified last year for the NCAA Division II national tournament after winning the individual title at the regional championship meet.

The Wildcats are young beyond Goethals and senior **Jeremy Reedy**, as only junior **Brock Rutherford** and sophomore **Garrett McGinn** have collegiate tournament experience.

The ACU tennis teams each lost valuable contributors from last year's squads, but both have high hopes for big things in 2004.

On the women's team, head coach Hutton Jones ('81) said goodbye to three all-America players who graduated (**Lacy Johnson**, **Kristin Chumley** and **Sarah Taweel**), but he welcomes back six players, including sophomore **Colleen Reynolds**, who might be on her way to becoming one of the most dominating performers in ACU women's tennis history. In October, Reynolds won the ITA Central Region championship to advance to the ITA Small College national tournament in Corpus Christi where she lost in the first round before rallying to win the consolation championship.

Reynolds will play at the No. 1 spot in both singles and doubles for the Wildcats this spring. She is joined by sophomore **Lauren Yarbrough**, juniors **Summer Beasley**, **Ashley Hawk**, **Rachel Taylor** and **Joy Israel**.

On the men's team, Jones welcomes back six of his top players from last year's 17-14 team that won the LSC and NCAA Division II regional titles before being bounced in the first round of the national championship tournament.

Among the returnees are seniors **Trent Broach**, **Clayton Morgan** and **Jason**

Purser, who are joined by junior **Jason Ray** and sophomores **Cole Griffith** and **Evan Puglia**.

The Wildcats' No. 1 player should be sophomore transfer **Casper Steenkamp** of South Africa, who in October won the ITA Central Region championship and advanced to the ITA Small College national championship tournament.

First-year softball coach **Chantiel Wilson** ('98) welcomes back an experienced ballclub with 10 letterwinners returning from last year's team that finished 24-31.

Leading the list is junior **Katie Bryan**, who was named first team all-LSC South Division and first team NCAA Division II all-region after hitting seven home runs and driving in 34 runs while hitting .369. Also back are three-year starters **J.D. Williams** at third base and **Heather Hicks** at catcher. Other returnees are outfielder **Michelle Gereaux**, **Katie Mehrhoff**, **Laessa Glover**, **Danielle Faulk**, **Kristin Alvarado**, **Heather Cochran** and **Ashley Whittenburg**.

Cochran (8-11 on the mound last year), junior transfer **Lacey Beaston** and freshman **Allison Crouse** will lead the pitching staff. ▲



Coach Britt Bonneau

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Colleen Reynolds

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Katie Bryan

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