

New pitchers fuel fast start

By SAM KING
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When Purdue's softball team opens Big Ten Conference play today, the Boilermakers will be playing with a little more swagger than in previous league openers.

After losing four-year starter and record-setting pitcher Brooke Baker last season, Purdue has found replacements in junior college transfer Dana Alcocer and freshman Suzie Rzegocki.

The pitchers' jump to Division I has done little to disrupt the progress of the Boilermakers, who are off to their best start in school history at 21-8.

"I think early on in the fall we knew (Alcocer and Rzegocki) were going to make a big impact," said senior third baseman Ashley Hall, Purdue's top returning player. "It was kind of left to what was between their ears, how their mind was going to be, whether or not they were going to do as well as they could."

That worry was put to rest on Feb. 29 when Alcocer tossed a no-hitter against UC-Davis.

Alcocer is 12-5 on the mound and Rzegocki is 8-3. Junior Ashley DiDomenico has progressively seen more mound time and earned her first vic-

Today's game

At Varsity Softball Complex
Penn State (23-8)

at

Purdue (21-8)

Time: 4 p.m.

Note: Varsity Softball Complex is located on Stadium Avenue, west of Northwestern Avenue.

tory of the season Wednesday against Butler.

"It is always tough when you come into a new program whether it is from high school or JC," coach Kim Maher said. "It may take some time to transition in. Fortunately for our pitching staff our defense has stepped up and played phenomenal behind them."

It took Rzegocki a little longer to adjust to playing at the college level in her own mind.

She admits it took her some time to realize she could compete against Division I veterans.

"I think the first game I was really nervous and I walked four or five batters, but once you get those jitters out of the way, it is just pitching another game," Rzegocki said.

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By Purdue Sports Information

Alcocer takes a 12-5 record into today's Big Ten opener.

PITCHERS

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Alcocer comes from Arizona, a softball talent gold mine. In junior college, she squared off against some of the nation's elite Division I teams in Arizona and Arizona State and helped her team win a junior college national title. She knew having that experience was a major factor in Purdue recruiting her.

"Coming in as a junior transfer, they were looking for someone who has some experience under their belt," said Alcocer, who leads the team with 72 strikeouts. "I was hoping to come in and keep



Hall

(Purdue) in ball games and get the job done."

Joining the Boilermakers offered a refreshing welcome to Rzegocki. The Lemont, Ill., native was the lone pitcher on her high school team. With the Boilers having several options on the mound, Rzegocki, who owns numerous Illinois high school state records, is able to have breaks between starts.

Purdue won its final four



Maher

conference games last season and defeated Iowa in the opening round of the Big Ten tournament before falling to Ohio State. The strong finish has given the team confidence going into 2008's conference opener at home against Penn State today, Maher said.

"It's not so much about the record right now," the third-year coach said. "I feel its more how we finished up the Big Ten Conference last year. We finished on a very good note. I know our players are capable of a lot more and their expectations of themselves and of each other are very high."

Hall has seen the booming confidence as well.

"Last year when we played teams we weren't supposed

to beat, we were like, 'what is the point of even trying to beat them,' " Hall said. "This year its, 'we aren't supposed to beat you but we don't care, we are going to beat you.' We have pulled out a lot of big wins early in the season."

Included in those big wins is a victory at then-No. 7 Baylor.

"That set the tone for our entire season and gave us the confidence to keep that carrying through the rest of the season and hopefully that keeps us going through Big Ten," Hall said. "As long as (the pitchers) keep doing what they are doing and as long as we keep backing them up the way we need to, we are going to be great this year."