Seahawks rally around Martin’s injury

Cabrillo is 8-0 despite losing the Aptos High graduate for the rest of the season

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APTOS — Angela Martin’s prior softball injuries never exceeded a broken finger or nose. But when the Cabrillo College freshman fractured her fibula in just the second game of the season earlier this month, she knew almost immediately her season was over.

“I knew right away because I heard it,” said Martin, an Aptos High graduate who helped lead the Mariners to a Santa Cruz Coast Athletic League co-championship last season.

On Feb. 4, during the second game of a doubleheader against Porterville, Martin’s cleat got caught in the ground while she was sliding into third base, resulting in a clean break that will have the pitcher and first baseman sidelined for three months.

“It went completely numb after the pain,” she said. “I actually cried about it. I knew the season was done for me.”

Martin was expected to be an integral part of this year’s Cabrillo softball team. She was named the Sentinel’s all-county softball Player of the Year as a junior and its all-County Offensive MVP as a senior. But losing her may also serve as a rallying point for a Seahawks team that lost four of five conference players to graduation last year and return just two sophomores to a 14-player roster.

Without Martin — whose presence was felt even in the first two games as she earned the win in Game 1 against Porterville and went 2-for-2 with a double in Game 2 before breaking her leg — Cabrillo is nevertheless off to an 8-0 start and is the last remaining undefeated team in the Coast Conference South.

The Seahawks will host Hartnell today in their conference opener at 3 p.m.

“She was a big addition to our pitching and it sucks that she got hurt,” said returning sophomore Jayme Sprague, a center fielder who attended Soquel High for two years before transferring to Cabrillo.

Sprague attended Soquel High for two years before transferring to Cabrillo and then transferring to San Jose State in 2004, was an assistant for the Seahawks for five seasons under Gene Johnson. Johnson retired last season at the age of 88.

Ballinger’s youthful squad has not batted at the step up to JC softball or the early season adversity. Already a tight-knit group after having played with or against each other in high school and traveled ball — only two players are from outside Santa Cruz County — the Seahawks have nearly exceeded last season’s win total [13] through non-conference play.

They’re jelling pretty well together,” she said.

Led by Sierra Clark, Amanda Davenport (.481 batting average), Andrea Espinosa (.480), Sprague (.464) and Jacky Arizumi (.421), each of whom holds one of the top 10 batting averages in the conference, Cabrillo is batting .396 as a team and averaging nearly eight runs a game.

Clark, in fact, is batting .704 [39 of 55] with 16 RBIs to lead all hitters in the conference.

“We have so many hitters up and down the lineup, one through nine, it’s good to see,” said Ballinger, who played for Johnson during her one and only year as a Seahawk.

“There are no weaknesses in the offense.”

Defense, so far, is another matter. Although the Seahawks have surrendered only 18 earned runs in 50 innings, communication on the field remains an issue. Ballinger, whose strength was her defense when she played third baseman growing up, has made Cabrillo’s defense a point of emphasis.

“The defense is coming along. We’re doing pretty good at this point in the season,” she said. “But we still have some work to do. I have high expectations for the girls.”

Lining up the cutoffs, knowing where to go in certain situations and overall mental awareness, Clark said, are all fixable problems.

The San Lorenzo Valley graduate, who also played volleyball for Cabrillo in the fall, has been a big boost for the Seahawks this season. Clark wasn’t planning on playing softball due to scheduling limitations, and she hadn’t played since her junior year in high school. She decided to come back in mid-January after speaking with Ballinger.

“I missed it more than I thought,” said Clark, who has teamed up with Lauren Colfer to handle the pitching duties this season. The Seahawks have a team ERA of 2.42 through eight games.

Each hurler offers a different style. Ballinger said, with Colfer throwing more “pump” and Clark offering more speed.

In the dugout of each game, meanwhile, is Martin. After receiving a medical redshirt this season, Martin is trying to help out any way she can, whether it means supporting the team vocally or tracking pitches and offering advice.

“It’s hard to watch,” said Martin, who was looking forward to this season, as it’s her last playing alongside cousin Andrea Espinosa, a sophomore. “I can’t be out there to help them.”

“But they’re looking strong. They have good chemistry.”