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Softball coach speaks about team's success



Coach Wayne Weatherford and Lena Weatherford at a Tampa Bay Rays game last year when the Lady Indians Softball Team was honored at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg.

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By Jeff M. Hardison © May 20, 2017 at 7:27 p.m.

Updated May 21, 2017 at 1:17 p.m.

CHIEFLAND -- Wayne

Weatherford is retiring as a softball coach after 25 years now, he said in a telephone interview Friday (May 19).

Coach Weatherford built the Chiefland High School Softball program during the past few years so that the Lady Indians won the Florida High School Athletic Association Class 1A State Championship in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

And the Lady Indians were the runner-up finalist in that state championship for 2017.

During this past week, Coach Weatherford, Assistant Coach Jimmy Anderson, Assistant Coach Harland Stalvey, and Lena Weatherford were among the adults who joined the girls at Historic Dodgertown in the City of Vero Beach.

This year's team of Lady Indians playing in the finals included the starting lineup of Sydney Parks (#11), Emily Hallman (#14), Lauren Parker (#3), Takiya London (#4), Macie Thomas (#15), Samantha Rolfe (#9), Erika Gilliam (#33), Aleaha Rhoomes (#1), Taylor Simpson (#19), and pitcher Kensley Durrance (#20). The substitute players were Tristan Drummond (#2), Brittany Tindall (#7), Karlie Meeks (#10), Raven Sheppard (#12), Simone White (#22), Jocelyn McGee (#17), and Chrystian Wetherington (#71).

The graduating seniors this year were Hallman, London, Rhoomes, Parker, Parks and Rolfe. These are the young ladies who earned three consecutive state championships and one state runner-up title.

These six young ladies were ninth graders when the Lady Indians earned the first state championship for the school, Coach Weatherford said. Over the years before and since, the coach said, they have matured together and bonded as a team.

The coaches, like the girls, are all like family, Weatherford said.

All of these girls are part of a special set. And now with graduation from high school they are all going to the next level, as they are playing in college next year, having been awarded scholarships.

The coach spoke first about the two-day championship finals.

As they traveled to Vero Beach, the team wanted to make history again by earning the fourth title. In fact, for Chiefland High School and Levy County, they had already become the superstars of sports, not just girls' sports.

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The coach spoke about the regular season of CHS Softball in 2016-17. The team had been defeated by the Union County Lady Fightin' Tigers twice in the regular season.

Even before that probable game, the team was facing the Lady Gators of Wewahitchka (Washington County).

That game on May 17 was a nail-biter, with the Lady Indians being down 0-1 at the bottom of the final inning when they turned it around and were victorious 2-1.

Coach Weatherford said they knew they were facing Union County, and no one had ever won a FHSAA state championship four consecutive years.

The coach said the girls felt like they had progressed since the regular season games against the team from the City of Lake Butler and they were ready for the final game.

"We really had high hopes that we would beat Lake Butler," he said, "but they have a lot of speed. That really hurt us."

The Union County Lady Fightin' Tigers bunted a lot in that final game, Coach Weatherford said. And while the Lady Indians can handle bunts very well, that just was not a very good day in that regard, he said.

"I just think Lake Butler was the better team that day," Coach Weatherford said, "and the best team did win."

The coach is retiring, however he has faith that the coaches coming after him are going to continue the trend of having a strong softball team in Chiefland.

When Weatherford was asked to coach softball in the early 1990s, he said, there was not a lot of coaching talent in that sport in Chiefland.

"So when we took it," Weatherford said, "it was a huge challenge to us. We wanted to make a big difference in Chiefland for our youth, who would go on to high school and then be where we are at today."

The coach said now that he is stepping down, he hopes to see "new, fresh better ideas" from the coaches who will be stepping up to continue the softball legacy of Chiefland High School.

The coach said he prayed about his decision a lot, and he talked about it a lot, and he decided now is the time to retire from softball coaching.

While he is retiring, to see this many young ladies continuing in the sport after high school "is the ultimate payoff."

"You work during your younger life," he said, "to get to the middle school level. Then you get to the high school level. And then to earn a scholarship – that's an ultimate payoff."

The coach said these players, with the support of their family and friends, have made a significant investment in softball.

And the success of Chiefland year after year has now "put Chiefland on the map for softball."