

MORENO, SIRAGUSA, BAGNIEWSKI WILL BOOST OFFENSE, PROVIDE STRONG DEFENSE**Softball Lady Cougars Shift Several Defensive Positions**By **DAVID B. CORBIN***Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

Several shifts in defensive positions have taken place this pre-season with the Cranford High School softball team, but one thing for sure, the Cougars will have a very talented veteran behind the plate and another on the mound.

"We have some returning starters, except most of the kids are playing new positions. We moved our third baseman to short, and we have a new third baseman in [sophomore] Maggie McKay. The constant for us is Melissa Moreno behind the plate. This will be her fourth year. And on the mound for her third season is Julie Siragusa. Those are our two mainstays," Cougar Head Coach Bob Bruno said.

Last year, Moreno, an All-County selection, was as solid as could be behind the plate.

"She has been a godsend for four years. If she wasn't the best catcher in the county, she was always in the top two or three. She has worked hard all summer, and we expect her to have an exceptional senior season. She has been accepted to Ramapo College, and she will continue playing softball," Coach Bruno said.

Siragusa, a junior, had been the Cougars' ace pitcher since her freshman season, but last year she injured her hip towards the end of the season, which really tossed a wrench in their postseason.

"That was a major injury for us, considering how dominant she is. She is getting stronger every day. She had a great outing in our scrimmage against Woodbridge. Struck out eight kids! When she's healthy, she is going to be someone to contend

with in the county," Coach Bruno said.

The left-handed hitting Siragusa was also very dangerous at the plate.

"Julie is a pleasure to watch play. As a softball coach, she is your consummate softball player. She is a very good hitter. If she weren't pitching, she would be the best outfielder in the county. Having college experience, if I were to recruit her, she could play outfield on most teams in the country," Coach Bruno said.

Senior Stephanie Bagniewski has returned to play second base. She is also strong with the metal stick, and she proved it with a

colossal home run against Roselle Park in the Union County Tournament quarterfinals last year.

"Steph has the potential to be an outstanding player. She has to believe in her ability to be that special person. She has shown that so far in the pre-season games. She is hitting that ball very well. She's in the number 4 spot. She's going to get up and there's going to be a lot of runners on in front of her," Coach Bruno said.

Sophomore Allison Verrelli, who started at third base last year, has shifted to shortstop.

"Allison has excellent ability. We moved her to shortstop. She

has a little bit more to learn, but she does things correctly," Coach Bruno said.

Senior Emily Snyder has returned to play leftfield, and senior Izzy Acton, a standout on the girls volleyball team, will play first base.

"Izzy played for us as a freshman. She was outstanding and then decided that her first passion was volleyball. That's understandable! She's an excellent volleyball player. I invited her to come back, and she has been doing a great job," Coach Bruno said.

Defensively, Coach Bruno said, "I am pretty sure the infield is

going to be the strength of our team, other than pitching and behind the plate. Outfield is a work in progress."

Several underclassmen have been vying for the outfield positions. Sophomore Kerry Wischusen will cover centerfield, and sophomore Jessica Casale will cover right field. Juniors Sara LoBue and Julie Schott will work the outfield also. Sophomore Victoria Mettlin will be a utility player.

Presently, Siragusa is expected to be the leadoff hitter with Snyder batting second. Moreno and Bagniewski will bat in the 3-4 spots, possibly followed by Verrelli, Acton, juniors Jenna Goeller or Jessica Rediger, Wischusen and Casale.

"Everything is going to go through Julie and Melissa. Julie is going to be the catalyst, and Melissa has that big bopper kind of thing, and Stephanie has to do her thing. Jessica Casale has excellent speed, so she will be adding a different dimension," Coach Bruno said.

The Cougars opened their season against Linden on April 3 and will host Union today, Thursday, April 5, at 4 p.m.



*See story and photos on page 15
In The Westfield Leader newspaper*

STRONG DEFENSE AND GOOD POWER... Pictured, left to right, are: Melissa Moreno, Julie Siragusa, Emily Snyder and Allie Verrelli, who are expected to supply strong defense and good offensive punch for the Cougar softball team.

David B. Corbin for *The Westfield Leader and The Times*

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