

Ladies hoping for Magic at championships

By Matt Peters
Neighbors sports writer

It's magic.

Not necessarily sleight of hand, mirrors or even rabbits and hats.

Just good old-fashioned magic, blended with a dash of chemistry and a sprinkling of philosophy.

At least, it seems it must be magic. What else could propel a team to a 47-3 record and a berth in the American Softball Association's National Championship this week?

"Of course, I'm prejudiced, but I think Magic is the best program around," said Larry Barnes, Lady Magic coach.

The Lady Magic team, which today begins its second quest since 1982 for a national championship at the ASA 15-and-under National Championships in Sioux Falls, S.D., is one of four teams in the Magic program.

This year, it is the most successful. All three of Lady Magic's losses came at the hands of Gordon's Panthers of Cypress during a five-game series. Gordon's, like Lady Magic, is among the teams given a good chance to win the national championship.

In 1985, after becoming the first Sacramento area team to advance to the 15-and-under national championships, Lady Magic finished fifth in the double-elimination national tournament.

This year, Lady Magic became the first Sacramento-area team to win a Pacific Coast Regional Championship.

That accomplishment represents the latest pinnacle for a program that began only five years ago.

Prior to 1982, Barnes was coaching in the NorCal leagues, a program similar to the local Bobby Sox programs.

Page 26—Neighbors—Thursday, August 14, 1986

"I'd noticed even back then, for the girls who were really competitive, there was only one tournament a year. I felt we were really missing the boat," Barnes said.

In 1982, Barnes formed a program called the Shady Ladies, which brought together many of the area's best high school-aged players to form a tournament team. At the same time, Jerry Sautler was forming the Magic program.

Finally, the Sacramento area's talent had been brought together, almost.

"Even though we did very well, we couldn't get over the hump," Barnes said, in reference to the split in local talent.

Then, because of what Barnes labeled Sautler's "unselfish devotion," the two teams merged. Barnes gives Sautler, who has stepped down from his coaching duties, most of the credit for making the Magic program successful.

Since its inception in 1982, Magic teams have won more than 85 percent of their games. During the past two years, the Lady Magic squad has won 22 of 25 tournaments it has entered.

Entering the national championships this year, the Lady Magic squad is encouraged by its victory in the Firecracker Tournament of Champions in Denver over the Fourth of July holiday. Lady Magic prevailed over 15 other regional and state champions to win the double-elimination tourney.

Barnes attributes Lady Magic's success to the strong talent available in the Sacramento area and to the team's positive approach to practices and games.

Sacramento talent is good, Barnes said, because of the strong competition available in ASA softball programs, very competitive high school programs, strong local recreational programs and a number of talented coaches.

'I'd noticed even back then, for the girls who were really competitive, there was only one tournament a year. I felt we were really missing the boat.'

— Larry Barnes



Local coaches like Cliff Strickland, an independent pitching coach, Mike Lamsom, who coaches in the LeFevre softball school and Tim Keirman, of Sacramento City College, have helped develop Sacramento's talent.

"Sacramento area pitching takes a back seat to no one in the country," Barnes claimed.

Barnes and his Lady Magic coaching staff has also worked to create a healthy

learning and playing environment.

"I'm a strong proponent of positive reinforcement," Barnes said. "They (the players) get down on themselves so hard they don't need a coach telling them how they screwed up."

Lady Magic practices are tough. "They don't take batting practice until they leave bunting practice, and they don't leave

See Magic, Page 27

Magic

Continued from Page 26

bunting practice until they get it right.”

But when game time rolls around, Barnes said, his job is to keep his players loose.

“The ballgame brings its own pressures,” Barnes said. “A successful coach can alleviate those pressures.”

A trip to the mound by Barnes in a tight situation is more likely to bring a smile to his pitcher's face than a stern reprimand from the coach.

“Hey, I think your boyfriend just left,” or, “Hey, there's a camera on you and your hair's a mess” are typical statements by Barnes on his mound trips.

Barnes credits his assistant coaches, Scott Barnes and Mike Saulter, with much of Lady Magic's success.

“The coaches disagree on a lot of issues,

‘The ball game brings its own pressures. A successful coach can alleviate those pressures.’

‘The coaches disagree on a lot of issues. . . which I think is a plus.’

— Larry Barnes

‘which I think is a plus,’ Barnes said. “But as a unit, we're awfully tough.”

And, of course, Barnes gives the ultimate credit for the team's success to the players.

“During the season these kids give up five days a week to softball,” Barnes said. On their off days the players, many of whom also play high school ball, are usually taking

batting or pitching practice. Before the end of the season, the girls will have played approximately 100 games.

“Burnout is a major problem. Sometimes we just have to take a week off.”

This week, with the national championship at stake, won't be one of them.