

# GCC baseball and softball tries to move forward after cancelled season

Michael Manny, Online Editor

Despite back-to-back losses to Division I Arizona Western College March 7, Gauchos head baseball coach Ed Trujillo believed that his team was turning a corner.

“We were playing good baseball, we just weren’t winning,” Trujillo said. “We were getting outstanding pitching and our hitting was kind of struggling. We were playing some very good competitive games. I think we were probably on course, as we have been the last two seasons, where we started slow and we finished really hard and fast.”

Two days later, March 9, the Gauchos softball team took the field for a doubleheader against the Pima Aztecs, losing two back-and-forth games, 8-5 in game one, and 13-10 in a game two that went into extra innings.

Head softball coach Rebecca Shaw thought that even with the losses, her team was competing much better against Division I teams compared to 2019.

“There’s always those tough games with the Pima’s, the Eastern’s and the Central’s, and all three of those schools we lost to in extra innings,” Shaw said. “And so, I felt like my team really felt like we were competing well against even the really great teams that, you know, one play here or one hit there could have made a difference in the game.”

Due to the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic, neither team will get to finish what they started.

COVID-19 shocks the sports world

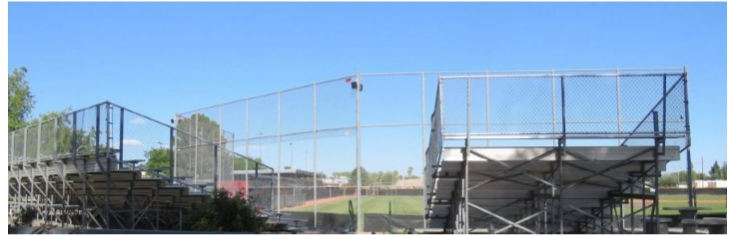
By design, baseball had no games scheduled until March 16, giving the team an opportunity to use spring break to rest up and regroup before the second half of the season would begin.

They would not have the chance to take the field again.

Just seconds before an NBA game between the Oklahoma City Thunder and Utah Jazz was set to tip off March 11, it was ordered to be delayed. According to ESPN Staff Writer Royce Young, Thunder Director of Medical Services Donnie Strack ran onto the court and quickly huddled with the game’s officials. After Thunder and Jazz head coaches Billy Donovan and Quin Snyder were informed of the situation, both teams went back to their locker rooms.

Soon after, news circulated from ESPN NBA Insider Adrian Wojnarowski. Jazz center Rudy Gobert had tested positive for COVID-19, and the NBA would suspend its season.

Unprecedented shockwaves were sent through the sports world, impacting every level, from Major League Baseball, to the NHL and high school sports.



The Glendale Gauchos baseball field sits empty after spring competition was cancelled by the NJCAA due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (The Voice/Michael Manny).

The day prior, March 10, the Ivy League became the first conference to cancel its college basketball tournaments. In the next few days, the other conferences followed.

The NCAA cancelled its men's and women's basketball tournaments, and all other spring and winter championships March 12. For the first time since the tournament began in 1939, there would be no national champion.

That decision made its way to the National Junior College Athletic Association, which first made the decision to suspend spring competition March 13. Three days later, spring sports and the men's and women's basketball national championships were cancelled entirely.

GCC men's basketball had qualified for its first appearance in the NJCAA Division II National Tournament for the first time since 2004. They are not going to get the chance to compete for a national title. Sophomores may have played their final game without realizing it.

When Trujillo found out the news via email and from GCC athletic director Peter Oliszcak, he said that he started following the story on social media and informed his team.

"We really didn't know what to do or what to say because we've never been in this kind of situation before," Trujillo said.

Outfielder Damien McElroy said that the news was hard to hear.

"We (the team) were pretty devastated because we got off to a rough start, but we were starting to pick things up right when the time it got cancelled," McElroy said. "So, we're all pretty bummed and, you know, a lot of the sophomore guys, they either, they're going to a different school or they are just not playing anymore."

Coming one win away from winning regionals and advancing to the NJCAA Division II National Tournament in 2019, the 2020 softball team's tag phrase this season was one word.

Finish.

"We wanted to finish, and we wanted to go to nationals, and so for that to be kind of like our motto going in and then for it to be taken from us without our control, I think was a tough pill to swallow," Shaw said.

"I had 10 sophomores on my roster, and they don't all plan on playing after this, so it was just that finality of knowing that we're never going to be together again."

The new normal

The entire GCC community is adapting to a new reality for now: online classes and working remotely.

"Personally, it kind of took a while to get used to, because, you know, we're out on the field every day," McElroy said. "So that being taken away from every day, you know, I mean, I kind of didn't know what to do with myself."

Trujillo is trying to stay positive during a tough time.

"I've been trying to tune in to a bunch of podcasts, continue my learning, coaching," Trujillo said. "I've been emailing and texting all my players to make sure they're still following up on their academics."

Coaches are also still working with players to find the best fit for their academic goals as well as a good positional fit if they are planning to play at the next level.

The NJCAA, National Association Of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and NCAA have granted an additional year of eligibility to spring student-athletes (baseball, softball, golf, track and field, tennis etc.). Giving sophomores a choice to stay at GCC for another season if they choose.

"As a father, and as a coach, I would want my son or my student-athlete to be able to utilize the next college or university with that extra year of eligibility," Trujillo said.

A dead period on face-to-face recruiting has been issued until May 31 at the NCAA level and May 15 for the NJCAA. Coaches and prospective players are communicating through phone calls, emails, texts and written letters. Since high school seasons have been cancelled as well, coaches cannot visit player's schools to watch their games.

McElroy has been in contact with Ottawa University Arizona and has also been offered a scholarship from Arizona Christian University. If this is it for him at GCC, McElroy will miss being on the field with his teammates most.

"You get to go to the field, and I mean, you have like 40 brothers out there, you know," McElroy said. "I think that's what I'm going to miss the most."

Trujillo and Shaw have gotten to spend more time with their families, something they may not have as much time to do during the busy spring season. While also remaining available for their teams.

"Being a mother is very important to me, so I'm happy that I can have that time with my kids, and then also I'm still here for my team during this time, too," Shaw said.

While away from baseball, Trujillo has been taking the opportunity to reconnect with his wife, son, daughter-in-law and two daughters. Watching TV shows and enjoying family dinners together.

"Every day is a gift, and being able to spend time with your loved ones, and your family and appreciate what they're going through," Trujillo said.