



Bright future ahead?
Pirates General Manager Ben Cherington is optimistic about the future. B2

Cameron excited to lead young Cougars

Longtime Valley coach Tom Cameron takes over a young but talented Charleroi girls team.

By JEREMY SELLEW
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At a recent workout, Charleroi girls soccer coach Tom Cameron put talented sophomore Bella Caroto alone on the goal line. In front of her were 10 teammates and her assignment was to dribble through all 10 players.

"She told me she couldn't do it," Cameron said. "Exactly, I told her. You can't do it because it's going to take a team to do it."

And so goes the theme for the Cougars this season.

In his first year at the helm of the Charleroi girls program, Cameron is taking a team-first approach to things with his small roster of players.

"I'm a keep-it-simple guy," Cameron said. "We have a three-year plan and our goal this year is we want to make the playoffs. We're going to put more emphasis on our section play. By the time these girls are seniors, I want them to be in the state playoffs."

"Now, whether we win, lose or draw, if these girls give me 100%, I'll have no complaints."

While the Cougars, who finished 4-11 overall in a 4-8 mark in Section 2-A, will field a team of 14 or 15

girls, there is plenty of talent. A faction of underclassmen chose not to return to the team this season, but Cameron said he's fine with that.

"You never know, maybe they'll come back. Technically, camp doesn't start until Monday, but I'm going to coach the girls who are here. I'm perfectly fine with that."

Caroto returns after a freshman season in which she scored 28 goals and had 11 assists. She led all freshmen in the WPIAL in scoring last year.

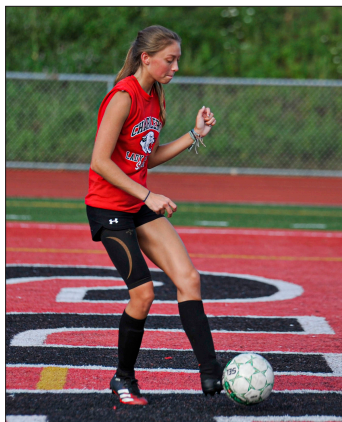
McKenna "Boots" DeUnger, also a sophomore, had 20 goals and eight assists and finished second behind her teammate in freshman scoring last season.

The pair shared the *Mon Valley Independent*-BeeGraphic Breakthrough Player of the Year Award last season.

"Everything's going to start with these two girls," Cameron said. "We're going to go through them. I was very open with the girls, though. We can't be a two-man team. It's going to take everyone."

Cameron said he likes the way Caroto and DeUnger work together and expects to have them both in the midfield.

"Last year, Bella was a forward. I want to get those two in the middle with the ball and working more together. We're still going to have a forward, but I think those two working closer together doesn't give teams an opportunity to take one of the other



Sophia Iacovino (left) will be a marking back for Cougars coach Tom Cameron this season while Bella Caroto looks to build off a season in which she scored 28 goals to lead all freshmen in the WPIAL.

out of the game."

Cameron doesn't hide the fact he likes to play a defensive game. He pointed to some of the close losses the Cougars suffered last season. Three games were one-goal games.

"I officiated a few of their games and I remember they were in a lot of games. It was just a matter of a late goal here, maybe some tired legs, or just a matter of kind of going into a shell and losing

late," he said. "Take those four close games and make those wins, they're 8-4 in section play."

Defensively, it will all start with sophomore Addison Conrad in goal.

"She's been working really hard. She still has some bad habits, but she's young. By the time she's a senior, she won't have those habits," Cameron said. "It all goes back to the plan. I think she's going to be a very good goal-



Jenn Codeluppi / MVI Sports

keeper. She made some really good saves and showed a lot of athleticism last season, and she's aggressive. She'll come out and bump you."

Cameron said Conrad has been working on her ball skills a little more this season.

lot for us because she can see the whole field at one time."

In front of Conrad will be Taylor Ramsdell, who will play sweeper. What she may lack in speed to play the position, she makes up for with her smarts and knowledge of the game.

"Taylor can see plays developing when they're three or four touches away," Cameron raved. "She's a great

standing she's going to start a

Youth summer league crowns six basketball champions

By JEFF OLIVER
MVI Sports

When Yancey Taylor was putting together his We Care for Kids Sports Summer Basketball League, he admitted he was pretty much winging it.

"I didn't know all the ins and outs or how it would turn out. I just wanted to do something for the kids," Taylor said. "When I was a kid, I was given an opportunity and I tried to make the most of it. It was important to me to give these kids an opportunity and an experience they would never forget."

"Once we started planning, things really took off."

For two months, Taylor's league brought over 350 boys and girls in grades 3-8 together to compete.

On Thursday, at Ringgold Middle School, six champions were crowned for winning their respective divisions.

Now that it's over, the former Ringgold and European basketball star said he just feels humbled and blessed.

"Things could not have gone any better," he said. "From the first day at Highland Terrace court in June when I saw the amazing crowd for the games to our last championship games, it was really smooth sailing."

"To see how hard these kids competed and worked through the summer, we didn't lose one kid. Nobody quit. That says a lot about these kids and my staff. What an experience this has been."

Taylor emphasized that the league wasn't about him, but about the kids, his

staff and sponsors.

"We preach working as a team to the kids and this was a total team effort," he said proudly. "This wasn't ever about me. It was a team effort from the kids, team effort from the staff, team effort from the parents and team effort from our sponsors."

Taylor praised his sponsors for their generous financial support, his staff of volunteers who gave of their time graciously and the parents of the players who were so supportive.

"I can't name everyone who helped, but they know who they are. They were the real stars," Taylor said.

He again mentioned the support he received from the Ringgold School District, Washington County Commissioners and the Washington County Housing Authority.

"Without their help, this doesn't happen. Everyone I went to was a huge help. People behind the scenes just came through large," he said. "It's nice to see so many people care about our kids, our future athletes, leaders, business people."

Taylor said that after games during the season, he made it a point to chat with parents to get their take on how things were going. The response he got was very satisfying.

"I can't tell you how many parents said this has been the best thing for their kids, for the community," he said. "They all said they can't wait to come back next year if we have the league."

So the question needs to be asked: Will there be a We Care for Kids Sports



3rd-4th grade boys champion: Addison-Clifton.



5th-6th grade boys champion: WG Tomko.



7th-8th grade boys champion: Addison-Clifton.



3rd-4th grade girls champion: Ford Business Machines.



5th-6th grade girls champion: RKB Electric.

League next summer?

Taylor didn't hesitate.

"God willing, if I'm blessed to still be here next year we are going to do it again and next time it will be bigger and better. That, I promise you."

One of the compliments Taylor received that touched him the most came from Mike Ghilani, the superintendent of the Thomas Jefferson School District.

Ghilani wrote on Taylor's

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Henry Davis, right, poses with Pittsburgh Pirates General Manager Ben Cherington at PNC Park July 18, 2021. Davis, the No. 1 overall pick in this year's MLB Draft, is just one of many young players Cherington has acquired to overhaul the organization's farm system.

AP

Cherington finds 'no silver lining' in club's freefall, looks toward future

He is optimistic regarding the team's future after working to overhaul the farm system through trades, signings and the draft.

By KEVIN GORMAN
Trib Total Media

Things looked bleak for the Pittsburgh Pirates amid an eight-game losing streak after being swept in back-to-back series against NL Central foes, so a visit from the first-place Milwaukee Brewers to PNC Park didn't do much to improve their outlook.

If general manager Ben Cherington was looking for a positive spin, he could simply flip the standings to see that the Pirates (41-74) are positioned for the fourth pick in the 2021 MLB Draft. Going into Friday's game against the Brewers at PNC Park, they trailed only Arizona (36-80), Baltimore (38-75) and Texas (40-75).

"I think there's a bright side of things, but it has nothing to do with next year's draft," Cherington said Friday afternoon on a video conference call. "I think the bright side of things for us is the amount of young talent we've been able to bring into the organization over the last calendar year or so, the growth that some of those players have shown, continued progress, we feel, in how we're approaching our work, whether it's in evaluation or

acquisition or development, and at the major league level. So encouraged by a lot that's going on."

The Pirates have overhauled their farm system through trades, international signings and the amateur draft. Though Cherington's trades that sent All-Star second baseman Adam Frazier to San Diego, left-handed starter Tyler Anderson to Seattle, relievers Clay Holmes to the New York Yankees and Austin Davis to Boston and closer Richard Rodriguez to Atlanta returned 11 prospects, it came at the expense of the decimating the major league starting lineup and pitching staff.

Since the MLB trade deadline passed at 4 p.m. on July 30, the Pittsburgh Pirates have lost 10 of 13 games to fall 28 1/2 games behind the Brewers in the NL Central standings. The Pirates have been outscored, 78-39, in the 13 games since the trade deadline passed, including 50-18 amid the eight-game losing streak.

"Very clear that we want to win, and if we're losing at the major league level, there's no silver lining to that," Cherington said. "What it means is that we just need to keep learning from that and how do we get better than those outcomes are better in the future."

The Pirates are hardly alone. Since trading off All-Stars Javier Baez, Kris Bryant, Craig Kimbrel and Anthony Rizzo, the Chicago Cubs (52-65) were 2-11 and also lost eight consecutive games going

into Friday's games. The Orioles also are on an eight-game losing streak.

The losing is wearing on the Pirates, though first baseman Colin Moran said many are concentrating on making the most of opportunities of regular playing time over the final six-plus weeks of the season.

"You try not to look up the record and just treat every day the same: work hard, play a good nine innings, play a good game and try to win the ballgame," Moran said. "We've got a lot of guys working real hard and trying to put some wins together."

Cherington called it "more challenging" for teams that were sellers at the trade deadline to remain competitive over the final stretch of the season, given that they are subtracting talent while their opponents are adding.

"Where our mindset needs to be is we need to prepare every day to win," Cherington said. "We need to go into games expecting to win. We need to execute in games with an eye on winning. When the game's over and we haven't scored as many runs as the other team then put our energy into learning from that and bringing it the next day and doing it again. I'm not suggesting that's easy but it's not supposed to be easy. We've got to have faith in the group in the clubhouse to do that."

Pirates GM comes to defense of Polanco

The 29-year-old outfielder, who is the organization's longest-tenured player, entered Friday hitting just .199

By KEVIN GORMAN
Trib Total Media

Pittsburgh Pirates general manager Ben Cherington defended the club's decision to continue starting Gregory Polanco in right field despite his inconsistency at the plate as they undergo a youth movement.

Polanco, who turns 30 on Sept. 14, was batting .199 with a .630 OPS entering Friday's game against the Milwaukee Brewers that marked his 81st start of the season, including 16 of the past 17 games, after coming off the 10-day injured list with a core muscle injury.

Cherington said the Pirates plan to continue playing Polanco, the organization's longest-tenured player, though he deferred lineup decisions to manager Derek Shelton. Polanco is one of their few hitters with power, as he ranks second on the Pirates with 11 home runs.

"I think we have felt, and still feel to this point, that he's a really talented player that's still not that old and we think finally healthy," Cherington said Friday afternoon on a video conference call. "We think [he's] still capable of being a good major league player. We're not blind to the performance. He is, if you think about the last couple years for Gregory, whether it was injuries or the short season, up until this year, he just simply didn't play a lot of baseball for a while."

"So I think we've had some desire to give him every chance to play a lot of baseball and find himself again. Now that we're past the deadline, I think Shelly will continue to make out the lineups. We talk about playing time, and again, we want to use playing time as effectively as we can, but it's gotta be earned. We want it to be earned. We'll see where that lines out, and Gregory's part of that. He'll have to continue to earn it."

High-A on Henry Davis

The Pirates assigned catcher Henry Davis to the High-A Greensboro Grasshoppers, and the No. 1 overall pick of the 2021 MLB Draft made a memorable debut.

In his first professional at bat, Davis hit a triple but was thrown out at home plate while trying to stretch it into an inside-the-park home run. Davis went 1 for 3, grounding into a forceout and striking out swinging before drawing a walk and scoring in the eighth inning of a 5-4 win over the Winston-Salem Dash on Thursday. Cherington said Pirates farm director John Baker and the player development and performance staffs determined that Davis arrived at Pirate City in Bradenton, Fla., "ready to go from a playing standpoint."

"We weren't surprised by that. He was pretty much in game shape and ready to compete from day one," Cherington said. "That allowed him to get into games pretty quickly there. I think we had hoped that he would be in a position to get out and play games in a full-season (league) and he proved pretty quickly that he was."

Cherington said the challenge was deciding where to send Davis, who skipped Low-A Bradenton to play at Greensboro. Seven of the Pirates' top 11 prospects, according to Baseball America, are playing for the Grasshoppers. That includes former first-round picks in right-handed pitcher Quinn Priester and second baseman Nick Gonzales.

"He expressed a desire to do that when he signed," Cherington said. "That's not the reason he's there, but it's good to hear that. That he wants to be part of those relationships and recognize that. 'Hey, these are guys that I aspire to play with and would love to get a head start on getting to know them.' We wouldn't want a decision only for that reason, but it's a good thing to hear. Can't hurt."

"It's not just the pitchers there. There are position players there too that we hope he plays with in the future. It's not the only place we have players that we believe in and care about a lot; we have those guys at every one of the levels. It just happened to fit where there's some playing time behind the dish. We think it's a level he can go to and compete. It's a big jump. College baseball, a little bit of a break, and now into High-A. Not easy. It'll be challenging. He's certainly up for a challenge. We think it will be productive for him and us as we plan for offseason and next year."



7th-8th grade girls champion:
Addison-Clifton.

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Facebook page: "Yancey, the league was a huge success. You should be proud. Your vision became reality."

"Things like that let me know it was all worthwhile," Taylor said. "That and watching the kids enjoy themselves."

COUGARS FROM B1

player and will do us a lot of good back there."

Sophia Iacovino, a junior who had six assists last season, will be the team's left back while Ella Sybolt will be the Cougars' other marking back.

"Sophia knows teams are going to attack from the right side, usually. I'm really excited to have her back there to shore us up defensively," Cameron added. "Ella brings good speed back there and she's shown she's willing to learn and get better. All of these girls have."

Cameron said he's also looking for breakout seasons from junior Aralyn Hartley and sophomores Maggie Cooper and Marissa Stiffy.

"I'd say an x-factor for us can be Maggie Cooper," Cameron said. "She's really getting after it and for being a young player, she's not going to back down from anyone."

"Rihanna is working really hard and there's going to be 15-20 minutes a game that she's going to go out there and battle for us. I think she can really make a difference."

Freshmen Rihanna Grogan, Mylie French and Frenanda Andrade will also be counted on for quality minutes.

"The biggest thing I want to do is change some culture and I want these girls to be involved," Cameron said. "I want their feedback and I want them to tell me what's working and what's not, and even who's working and who's not. As a team, that's important. This is not my team, it's their team. And we have enough talent on this team to make some noise."

Cameron expects defending section champion Steel Valley to be at the top of the section, but from there it's up for grabs. "I think there's a nice mix of teams, including us, battling it out for the second, third and fourth spot," Cameron said. "I love being here and I love coaching this group already. The biggest thing I see so far is they're smiling during practice and they're bonding as a team. That's the most important thing, that's going to carry us a long way."

After scrimmages against Brownsville and Waynesburg Central, Charleroi opens the season Tuesday Sept. 7 at home against Elizabeth Forward.



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"Boots" DeUnger returns to the Charleroi midfield after scoring 20 goals last season.

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