

The Olympian

No shortage of talent

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It's a topic that evokes much debate among South Sound fastpitch coaches and players.

After all, Tumwater shortstop Ashley Andrews signed to play next year at the University of Tennessee, a perennial NCAA power. And the talent on the mound might be even better.

Pitchers [Ramona Lorton of Centralia](#), Annaleisha Parsley of Timberline and Lauryn Ticknor of Chehalis all were all-state selections last season. Lindy Baxter of River Ridge, who has signed to play at Central Washington University, and Krista Shannon of Capital were second-team all-state picks as pitchers last season.

"The more that some of the club teams become established, we're seeing more kids come through that are dedicated to the game," Timberline coach Carl Raben said. "A lot of these kids started at Thurston County Fastpitch and develop through there."

Eighth-year Capital coach Mel Weems isn't as sure.

The Cougars have won four state championships, but none since 1998. He believes participation in club softball has diminished locally and other areas have passed South Sound when it comes to talent.

"The Olympia area and Vancouver used to be the bedrock of fastpitch in high school," Weems said. "I've seen through the years, the talent has depleted in our area and gone up north into Bonney Lake and Seattle."

All coaches surveyed seemed to agree that the talent is at least as good as most years, and many were impressed with the aptitude on the mound.

"Lindy, Ramona, Lauryn Ticknor out of Chehalis: You're going up against a pretty good thrower every day," Centralia coach Ken Olson said about the talent in the Class 2A Evergreen Conference.

[Lorton, a junior left-hander, prides herself on a changeup and drop ball she uses to induce ground balls. But unlike many who rely on ground balls, Lorton doesn't just pitch to contact.](#)

As she helped Centralia to the 2A state finals a year ago, Lorton finished with a 17-4 record, 1.24 ERA and averaged 8.7 strikeouts per game. Offensively, she also set a school record with three home runs.

When Lorton faces River Ridge, it's a contrast of styles.

Lorton said she can't throw a rise ball - Baxter's specialty. That pitch - along with an arsenal that includes a changeup, curveball, drop ball and fastball - helped Baxter strike out 181 batters during the regular season.

Baxter was named as the Evergreen Conference's MVP after she helped River Ridge to its first state-playoff appearance last year.

Baxter said because many of the area's top players grew up playing together and against each other on club teams, it can be difficult because they know the others' tendencies well.

One of those players is Andrews, who took up softball at age 8 with her father's Olympia Panthers.

"She can play anywhere except pitcher," Tumwater coach Clay Hill. "And I bet if I put her out there with a week's practice, she would find a way to win."

Baxter said she tries to mix pitches against Andrews because she's difficult to fool. The "mind games" when she faces Parsley. She just wishes they were in the same league so they could play against each other more.

"When she's up at bat, I just want to strike her out and I know she feels the same way when I'm up there," Baxter said.

Parsley might be the most well-rounded player in the group.

She was named the Most Valuable Pitcher of the Class 3A Western Cascade Conference last season and also is Timberline's No. 4 hitter.

"When she has command of her three pitches, she's darn near unhittable," Raben said.

Shannon might be just as versatile.

She struck out 82 batters and walked seven in the eight games she pitched at the 3A district and state tournaments.

"She's a very confident person and displays that on the field with her performance in the circle," said Weems, adding that she throws a changeup, drop ball, rise ball and screwball. "She has four pitches and usually has exceptional command of all of them."