



## Softball team heads to 1st NCAA tournament

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ATLANTIC SUN SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT

# A-SUN SHINE



News-Journal photos-CHAD PILSTER

Stetson players celebrate their Atlantic Sun Conference title after winning two games Saturday vs. Gardner-Webb in DeLand.

## Hats in 1st NAAs with 1st conference title since '88

By TONY JONES  
STAFF WRITER

DELAND — The way they mobbed each other at the pitcher's circle following the final out was telling. The tears that flowed, followed by the congratulatory hugs, were spine-tingling as well.

On Saturday afternoon, before a packed house at Patricia Wilson Field, the Stetson softball team erased last year's disappointment by doing one simple thing: winning the Atlantic Sun Conference Tournament and a berth in the NCAA Tournament for the first time in school history.

It took two victories, both over Gardner-Webb by scores of 3-0 and 6-4, and four hours of drama and angst. But when the final out was recorded, a lazy fly ball that freshman center fielder Amy Joyce easily plucked out of the air, it seemed as if an entire piano was lifted off the backs of the Hatters players.

"It feels great to be able to get it done this time around," sophomore pitcher Erica Demers said. "I feel the best for the seniors. We really wanted to do it for them."

STETSON 3-6  
GARDNER-WEBB 0-4

### NCAA Selection Show

**WHAT:** Stetson will find out where they will play in the NCAA regionals beginning Thursday  
**WHERE:** Stetson will watch at Beef O'Brady's in DeLand.  
**WHEN:** Today, 3 p.m.  
**TV:** ESPN News

Unlike last season, when they were six outs from the conference title before falling victim to Florida Atlantic's late inning rally, the Hatters will watch the selection show together at 3 p.m. today without the pressure of wondering if an at-large bid will be coming their way.

Last year, despite a 41-14 record, they didn't get an NCAA bid. They have several players — and coach Frank Griffin — to thank for not having worry about that this year.



Stetson's Amy Joyce (21) slides safely into home as Gardner-Webb's Abbie Looper awaits the ball in their second game Saturday in DeLand.

First and foremost is junior second baseman Nicole Forbes, the tournament MVP who hit a two-run homer in the first game Saturday and made a diving catch in the bottom of the fifth inning that saved at least a run when Gardner-Webb was rallying.

"That was the play of the tournament," Griffin said. "She had no

chance to come up with that catch, yet she did. That's what she's been doing the entire season: coming up with the impossible."

Demers, coming off an uneven performance Friday, was lights out in the first win over Gardner-Webb, firing a one-hitter.

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## HATS

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Demers won both games, with senior Heather Colding coming on and pitching the final three innings of Game 2 to record her first save of the year.

Beyond Demers and Forbes, Andrea Migliori continued a record-breaking year.

On Thursday, the sophomore set the school season record with her 16th home run of the year. She set another school mark in much different fashion Saturday, breaking the season RBI record on a suicide squeeze in the second game.

Lastly, Griffin coached as aggressively as one could for two games. He switched his lineup before the first game, putting regular leadoff hitter Joyce in the ninth spot and moving everyone else up a spot. It

worked, as Sherrel Fountain went 4-for-5 on the day with an RBI from the leadoff spot, while Joyce recorded two hits and stole two bases.

The first four hitters of the lineup recorded nine of the 17 hits Stetson had Saturday.

"It's seldom that any of my plans work," Griffin said. "I made the switch because today was a tough situation to ask a freshman to bat leadoff. I also wanted to get Migliori up to that third slot because I wanted her to be assured of getting an at-bat in the first inning of both games."

It's telling the Hatters were never in danger of losing either game after struggling to advance through the tournament Friday. The pitching was there Friday, but the bats struggled. Stetson had no such troubles Saturday, constantly producing offensively and jumping on top of the Bulldogs early in both

contests.

"We had a lot of hits on Friday," Forbes said. "But we never put them all together. We put everything together today. We just played two great games."

**OF NOTE:** This is Stetson's fourth conference title and the first since winning three straight as members of the New South Women's Athletic Conference from 1986-88. An automatic NCAA tournament berth did not accompany those titles.

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### Stetson 3, Gardner-Webb 0

Game 1  
Gardner-Webb 000 000 0-0 10  
Stetson 100 000 x-3 9 0  
Beck (L, 18-11) and Sherrill; Demers (W, 20-5) and Golden, 2B—Fountain (S), Lindsey (GW) 3B—none HR—Forbes (S)

### Stetson 6, Gardner-Webb 4

Game 2  
Stetson 120 201 0-6 8 0  
Gardner-Webb 001 201 0-4 8 3  
Demers (W, 21-5), Colding (S), and Golden; Coffey (L, 10-9), Walls (S) and Sherrill, 2B—Migliori (S), Looper (GW) 3B—none HR—Lindsey (GW), Whitfield (GW), Williams (GW), Ward (GW)