

# Thousand Oaks Acorn

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## Unearthing the silver linings

By Jonathan Andrade

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**A GOOD SPORT—Breana Valenzuela is a leadoff hitter and shortstop for the Lancers. Valenzuela is bound for the University of Memphis.**

No deficit discourages the Lancers.

The [Thousand Oaks High](#) softball team trailed Agoura 11-0 heading in to the bottom half of the sixth inning Tuesday afternoon, but the Lancer dugout remained as loud and boisterous as it was in the opening frame.

“We definitely try to stay into the games as much as we can,” junior catcher Kealia Wysocki said. “I feel like that’s one of our strong suits.”

Senior pitcher Danni Ryan said Thousand Oaks (4-17-1 overall, 1-6 in the Marmonte League) doesn’t quit.

“We always try to keep going no matter what,” Ryan said. “Even if we’re way ahead or way behind, we always just want to push until the end.”

Ryan and her teammates went wild when Wysocki socked a solo home run to dead center field to put the Lancers on the board. Though a win was out of reach, the team was glad to go down swinging.

The new, relentless mentality has a lot to do with the Lancers’ new coaching staff. Thousand Oaks shuffled through three head coaches in four seasons, but players say the team hit the jackpot with head coach DeAnn Young and her staff.

“I love these coaches,” Ryan said. “I wouldn’t trade them for anything. It was hard at first to adjust to what they like, but everything works out for the best.”

Young lit a fuse under the Lancers. The skipper was a standout first baseman at [Camarillo](#) before suiting up at Oregon State, where she earned All-Pac-10 Conference honorable mention honors. She said she believes there’s great potential in the Thousand Oaks program.



“It’s a big build up from last year,” Young said. “Last year the team gave up early in the year. We try to keep motivating them to be



**THE RYAN EXPRESS—** Danni Ryan, seen here delivering a pitch last season, is a senior star for the **Thousand Oaks High softball team**. Ryan will continue her softball career at the **University of Toledo**. Photos by **MICHAEL COONS/Acorn Newspapers**

better as individuals rather than

worry about the scoreboard. We’d rather focus on ourselves and what we can do on the field than what the other team is doing.”

Her philosophy is simple: Minimize mistakes and the wins will come.

“The mental part of the sport is key,” Young said. “Once we can eliminate those (mistakes) and function as a team, the rest will take care of itself.”

Breana Valenzuela said she appreciates having a coach with on-field experience.

“I think it’s such an honor to have coaches who played in college,” the senior shortstop said. “Since I’ll be continuing my career in college, it’s amazing to see what they learned because they teach us. I think it’ll benefit the program a lot down the road. I think this team will do great under these coaches.”

Valenzuela, who will play at the University of Memphis next year, is one of the Lancers’ best players. The leadoff hitter leads in the batter’s box, in the dugout and at practice.

“Being a senior and a leader is kind of a new challenge for me,” Valenzuela said. “It’s a learning experience because we have a lot of young girls. I try to motivate my teammates while motivating myself to try to lead by example. It’s difficult, but fun.”

Meagan Durazo, Samantha Guzman and Kailey Jones are also senior leaders.

Kelly Lucas, Hannah Santos, Sonja Torres and Laura Zisko are top juniors.

Ryan, the team’s ace pitcher, shoulders most of the innings in the circle. Wysocki starts behind the plate.

“ They’re intimidating,” Young said of Ryan and Wysocki. “They’re big hitters.”

Sophomores Lauren Bracken and Allie Thompson, and freshmen Jessica Torosian and Brooke

Gilliam are promising youngsters.

Bracken sees most of her innings at third base. Thompson splits her time between pitcher and first base. Torosian is a versatile infielder.

Gilliam is one of the team's top outfielders. She's also improved in the batter's box.

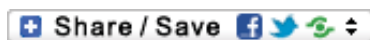
"She's worked hard," the coach said of Gilliam. "She comes in taking those big hacks that you want every girl to take. She can get a hold of one."

Young said she's looking forward to leading the Lancers to more victories in the next few seasons.

The Lancers believe in Young, her staff, and, more importantly, they now believe in themselves.

"The future is very bright," Wysocki said. "I feel like the next three years, we're going to be totally set. Thousand Oaks will be one of the top teams, so I'm excited for that."

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