

## **Webster's lineup shuffle pays off for Titans softball**

*by Chris Hunt*

[chris@mountainislandweekly.com](mailto:chris@mountainislandweekly.com)

Page 12 • Mountain Island Weekly • May 8-14, 2009

You have to hand it to Hopewell softball coach David Webster for making tough decisions this season. After losing five of their first 10 games, the Titans needed a jumpstart. Playing .500 ball is well below Webster's lofty expectations. The Titans have built a championship reputation, capturing the 2002 and 2003 4A state championships. In 2008, Hopewell had just three losses during the regular season.

So after spring break this season, Webster shuffled the team's lineup. The results spoke volumes. Hopewell topped previously undefeated West Meck twice (5-2 and 7-0) and hammered MECA 7 4A conference rival Central Cabarrus 5-1. It was the first victory over Central Cabarrus in the Hopewell program's eight-year history. "It took some time for us as coaches to figure out where to play everyone," said Webster. "I feel real comfortable with the lineup we have now." It's not like Webster was making small tweaks, either. He moved starting shortstop Lindsey Russell, just a sophomore, to the all important position of pitcher. Webster did so after former starter Stephanie Spain asked to move back to first base, her natural position. Spain essentially took one for the team, advising Webster that Russell was the Titans' best chance to win games. Russell proved Spain correct, allowing just two runs in four starts. Russell has three shutouts this season. With a hole at shortstop, Webster started a game of musical chairs in the infield. First, he moved second baseman Chaney Watson to shortstop and filled her departure with senior third baseman Christiana DeAndrea. Next, he pulled Racquel Cooke from left field and put her at the hot corner. Cooke adjusted quickly; making five impressive fielding plays against Central Cabarrus to preserve Russell's victory. Cooke also has a strong arm to make the throw from deep down the third-baseline. Now, with Spain's steady glove at first base, Hopewell has one of the toughest infields in the MECA 7.

Interestingly, Cooke moved in the batting order, too. The East Lincoln transfer started the season as a leadoff slap hitter. But after Webster saw her take a couple big swings, he moved her to sixth in the order, where he thinks she'll be more productive driving in runs than scoring. Webster has the luxury to move her because Watson is also a talented leadoff hitter. The Titans' skipper plugged former starting outfielder Carmin Schelling into left field. Schelling joined the team late this season after a change of heart. She was going to skip the 2009 season but missed the sport too much. Since then, Webster has been trying to find a way to get Schelling's bat into the lineup. When he did, she responded with a two-run double against Central Cabarrus.