

2018 SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR



Journal photo illustration by Ron Aguir

Hedgesville junior Miranda Payne, a pitcher/third baseman who had quite an offensive season in leading the Eagles to a sectional championship, has been named as The Journal's Softball Player of the Year.

Proving a hit

Eagles' Payne uses offense to pick up for pitching

BY ERIC JONES
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HEDGESVILLE — Miranda Payne sees the 2018 softball season from a glass-half-full perspective.

The Hedgesville junior didn't have the type of pitching season she would have liked, but she had one of the best hitting seasons of her career and one of the best efforts at the plate in the area.

"I had kind of a rough year pitching-wise, but hitting-wise, it was better than last year. I wish I could have had both," she said. "I think I could have definitely done a lot better but it really wasn't a bad year. I just had a few more bad games than I usually would."

Still, Payne finished the year with five pitching wins to go along with a .506 batting average, 39 hits, 33 runs batted in, 29 runs scored and .944 fielding percentage.

For her all-around effort, Payne has been named The Journal's 2018 Softball Player of the Year.

Payne was asked to do much for Hedgesville this year as one of the few upperclassmen on the team — in the circle, at the plate and in the field.

She really stood out in the latter two, finishing with the highest average in the area, while ranking second in hits, second in RBI and tied for second in runs scored.

Payne, a second-team all-state selection as an infielder, also had 14 multi-hit games and drove in multiple runs 10 different occasions.

"I think it was I really bought into the offseason, and having the extra swings and getting to the field whenever I could, I think that really helped. So just buying into the offseason was the biggest difference," Payne said.

Throughout the season, Payne was also tasked with playing two different positions for the Eagles, either at pitcher or third base. Wherever she was in the field, Payne tried to maintain her focus, the type of focus that resulted in her only making four errors the entire season.

"It's definitely a lot different, but I still have the same focus, and you can't let your mind wander off and not be focused on the game. When you're pitching, you're in every single pitch, but at third, and anywhere really, you just have to be like, 'OK, don't get in la la land,' and you have to still focus on the game and know that any ball can be hit to you no matter who it is or what the pitcher is doing. You have to stay focused."

After a tough battle in sectional play, which resulted in the Eagles winning a second straight title, Hedgesville turned its attention to Washington and trying to earn a trip to the state tournament.

The Eagles got off to a fast start, beating the Patriots 8-3 in the first game of the best-of-three series, one in which Payne went 2 for 4 with three RBI. From there, though, Hedgesville dropped the final two games of the series — 10-1 and 2-0.

ALL-AREA SOFTBALL TEAM

TAYLOR CENATE
JUNIOR
WASHINGTON

KYLIE CONDON
JUNIOR
WASHINGTON

MIKKY DAVIS
SOPHOMORE
MUSSELMAN

ISABELLA FORTE
SOPHOMORE
HEDGESVILLE

KATIE HOFFMAN
JUNIOR
BERKELEY SPRINGS

KEELIEGH MEGARREE
SOPHOMORE
SPRING MILLS

CAITLIN MYERS
SENIOR
WASHINGTON

MACKENZIE MYERS
FRESHMAN
WASHINGTON

MIRANDA PAYNE
JUNIOR
HEDGESVILLE

ALYSSA PARKS
SENIOR
HEDGESVILLE

KARRA SMITH
SENIOR
JEFFERSON

AMANDA ORKOSKEY
WASHINGTON
COACH OF THE YEAR

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Payne

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"It was definitely different this year than previous years. The weather, I think, really threw us off because we were like, 'We won, we beat them,' which I knew we could because we had a lot of talent. When we did it, it was like, 'See, this is our confidence booster, we have this,'" Payne said. "With the weather, and the game being pushed off, we played again and it was back to Square 1. I feel like if we would have played the day

after, we would have had it. I think the weather pushing it off made us go back in our shell, even though we knew we could win."

That certainly led to a number of what-ifs for the Eagles.

"It was definitely frustrating, and I think a lot of it was the way we hit. We hit so well the first game, off both pitchers, and then it was like, 'Oops, (Taylor) Cenate's pitching,' even though we hit her in the first

game," Payne said. "We had two errors in the first inning of the last game, and that was literally the difference. I think we let the nerves get to us instead of playing the game like we know how to."

Payne has one more season left with the Eagles, but for now, she'll focus on travel ball with the Tri-State Thunder, which will occupy her weekends until sometime in August.

"I'm excited to go back to travel ball," she said.