



2017 MID-SEASON REPORT

Following a slow 6-7 start, the Challengers heated up after returning from their spring break trip, winning 10 of the last 11, running their record to 16-8 on the season. Having won their last seven games, including a 4-game sweep over 2016 World Series participant Monroe Community College, the team looks to be getting on track as they head into conference play. The Challengers begin to defend their 2016 Ohio Community College Athletic Conference Championship this weekend as they host conference newcomer Mercyhurst-North East in a 4-game series on Saturday and Sunday at Mottl Field.

During the recent run of success, strong starting pitching has lead the way including three shut-outs over this span. Leading the way for the Challengers thus far on the mound are a pair of sophomores. RHP Anthony Savarino (Olmsted Twp/Olmsted Falls) has emerged to lead the starting rotation with a record of 4-0, and an ERA of just 1.21 in his five starts. Savarino is coming off a week where he was named OCCAC Pitcher of the Week, the second time he has received this award this season. LHP Juan Perez (Cleveland/James F Rhodes) continues to anchor the bullpen as he leads the team in ERA at 0.89 and appearances with seven. A trio of freshman pitchers RHP Noah Evans (Massillon/Jackson), RHP Dylan Brister (Elyria/Midview) and LHP Cameron Johnson (Pataskala/Watkins Memorial) look to round out the weekend rotation at this point. Additionally, a pair of freshman have stepped into key bullpen roles and have had good success in the early season. RHP Gunnar Dietz (Westerville/South) has allowed just one earned run in six appearances and RHP Dustin Redish (Hopedale/Harrison Central) has three saves in his six appearances.

Offensively, the Challengers have been paced by SO OF Matt Starcovic (North Olmsted/North Olmsted) and FR INF Sami Mehmed (Strongsville/Strongsville). Starcovic is leading the team in hitting at .447 and is second in HR's with five and RBI's at 20. Mehmed has been a key piece to the recent success, hitting .436 on the year and leading the team in stolen bases with 11. FR 1B/DH Matt Hilderbrandt (Bowmanville, ONT/Bowmanville) has brought some power to the lineup, leading the team in 2B's and HR's with six each, as well as RBI's with 26. SO INF Ricky Kemp is currently hitting .353 and has been a versatile option having started games at all three infield positions thus far.

The outlook for the upcoming conference schedule looks bright and Coach Agona is pleased with the progress his young squad has made, but knows there are still strides that need to be made in order for his team to repeat in 2017. "Our guys have responded well to a slow start, and have continued to work to make adjustments and improve each day. We knew the early season was going to be difficult as we had a very demanding schedule on the road, and had so many new players in key roles this spring. We feel like we have a lot of depth on and off the mound, and expect to continue to get better as our young guys continue to get more experience and adjust to the college game. In order to continue our run of recent success, we just need to be consistent in our approach offensively, make routine plays defensively and throw strikes on the mound. If we don't beat ourselves, we feel like we have the talent to be in position to repeat as conference champs."

As stated earlier the Challengers open their 20-game Ohio Community College Athletic Conference slate this weekend as they host Mercyhurst-North East on Saturday and Sunday in 4-game series. Double-headers both days are scheduled to begin at 1 PM. Be sure to follow the progress of the Challengers all season long with updates on Twitter @TriCBaseball and Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/TriCBaseball>. For more information visit our website <http://www.tri-c.edu/athletics/mens-baseball/index.html> and statistics are available all season long at <http://stats.njcaa.org/sports/bsb/2016-17/div2/teams/cuyahogacommunitycollege>.