



2017 POST-SEASON PREVIEW

The 2017 regular season has concluded, but there are still high hopes for the Challengers as they enter post-season play this weekend. The 16th ranked Challengers closed out the regular season with an overall record of 40-12 and a record of 16-4 in the Ohio Community College Athletic Conference, good enough for a second place conference finish. The Challengers entered the final weekend of the conference season with a chance to repeat as conference champs, however, fell one game shy of doing so after dropping a series versus Sinclair Community College. After reaching 40 wins in their 11-8 victory over the University of Mount Union JV, this marks back-to-back season of reaching the 40-win milestone. As a result of their second place finish in the OCCAC, the team qualified to participate in and host the NJCAA Region 12 Sub-District Tournament.

The Sub-District Tournament will be held at Ron Mottl Field at Cuyahoga Community College in Parma on Friday May 12th. Game one will match Edison Community College and Lakeland Community College beginning at 11:00 AM, followed by Cuyahoga Community College taking on Vincennes University at 2:00 PM. This tournament is single-elimination format and the winners of the each game will play again at approximately 5:00 PM for the Sub-District Championship and a bid to the NJCAA Region 12 District Tournament to be held in Battle Creek, Michigan beginning May 17th.

As the regular season concludes and post-season play begins, the Challengers will look to rely on an offense that has been highly ranked in several national categories throughout most of the season. Currently the team ranks third in the country in homeruns (60) and sixth in runs scored (444). Individually, SO OF Matt Starcovic (North Olmsted / North Olmsted) continues to set the pace as he leads the team in runs (58), hits (66), doubles (17) and batting average (.426), as is second in homeruns (11) and RBI (50). Freshman 2B Sami Mehmed (Strongsville / Strongsville) has been a table setter for the middle of the lineup hitting at a .395 clip, to go along with 10 doubles, 4 triples, 1 homerun and a team high 15 stolen bases. In addition to Starcovic, the middle of lineup has been anchored by a pair of freshmen, 1B Garret Robberts (Utica/Utica) and DH Matt Hilderbrandt (Bowmanville, ONT / Bowmanville). The big guys in the middle have provided the power as Hilderbrandt leads the team in homeruns (13) and RBI (56), while Robberts is third on the team in both categories with 8 homeruns and 40 RBI. The other mainstay in the lineup has been SO 3B Collin Minor (Medina / Medina) who batting .344 while driving in 27.

While the offense has led the way through much season, pitching is always key to a successful post-season run. The Challengers will look to a trio of sophomores who have been throwing well. RHP Anthony Savarino (Olmsted Twp / Olmsted Falls) has been the team's number one starter much of the year and leads the team in wins (7), innings (56.2), and strikeouts (49) to go along with an ERA of only 2.06. Redshirt SO transfer LHP Axel Bueter (Wauseon / Bowling Green State University) has really come into his own the last month of the season as he has stepped into the conference rotation. Bueter collected the only win in the recent series versus Sinclair Community College, and has won four consecutive starts for an overall record of 5-0. LHP Juan Perez (Cleveland / James F. Rhodes) has worked primarily out of the bullpen in his 13 appearances, but has accumulated a record of 5-1 with 2 saves in his 41 innings of work to go along with a 1.98 ERA. The other consistent member of the rotation this spring has been FR RHP Noah Evans (Massillon / Jackson). Evans has started nine games, going 5-2 with an ERA of 4.17 in his 45.1 innings of work.

Although the team came up short of an opportunity to repeat as conference champs, Coach Agona knows his squad is good enough to make a deep post-season run. "We were all disappointed that we couldn't find a way to get one more win versus Sinclair and accomplish our goal, we had some opportunities and those didn't go our way, that's baseball. Now we need to regroup and take on the next challenge that lies ahead and that is the Sub-District Tournament this weekend. We have seen all three teams earlier this year and have gone 9-0 so far, but all three have enough talent that we need to be ready to go. I hope that we can continue to get a little healthier this week, as we have been dealing with some key injuries over the last couple of weeks and get back near full strength. We are looking forward to a chance to compete this weekend and hopefully next week up in Michigan."

Be sure to follow the Challengers post-season journey 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>.