



2017 SEASON PREVIEW

Coming off a record setting 47-win campaign, the Cuyahoga Community College baseball team continues to have high expectations as they set out to defend their OCCAC Championship in 2017. The 2016 season was certainly one to remember for Head Coach Evan Agona and the Challengers. After an up and down start where the Challengers battled through a demanding early season schedule and some key injuries, the Challengers won 37 of the final 41 regular season games in route to the OCCAC Championship. While the team earned a bid to the NJCAA Region XII Tournament, the Challengers went 3-2 during play earning a 3rd place regional finish. Head Coach Evan Agona returns for his third season at the helm and once again has high expectations as they look to defend their conference title and complete some unfinished business in the post-season during 2017.

This year's version of the Challengers will feature a lot of new faces. Gone are 13 sophomores, many of whom played key roles on last year's championship team. Eight of those players have moved on to 4-year programs highlighted by C Gabriel Vargas (Eastern New Mexico University), SS John Izquierdo (Tabor College), DH Richie Perez (Point Park University), 1B Tyler Lienerth (Baldwin-Wallace University) and P Kyle Warner (Shawnee State University).

Only two regulars return to the lineup in 2017. All-Conference CF Matt Starcovic (North Olmsted/North Olmsted) who led team in homeruns and RBI's looks to anchor the line-up along with All-Region Gold Glove winning 3B Collin Minor (Medina/Medina). In addition to Starcovic and Minor only three other returning position players return that saw significant time. Leading that group is Jim Parker (Berea/Midpark) who will see time in a variety of roles, along with INF Ricky Kemp (Brunswick/Brunswick) and C Hunter Tome (Westerville/New Albany).

One of the biggest question marks heading into the season looks to be replacing two-time all-conference C Gabriel Vargas. Freshman Enzo Bonventre (St. Clair Shores, MI/Lake Shore) and returner Hunter Tome are the leading candidates at this point, while sophomore transfer Justice Magee (Pine Ridge, ONT/University of St. Francis, IND) and freshman Johnny Robinson (Strongsville/St. Ignatius) are also in the mix.

Beyond Starcovic in the outfield, returner Zach Desa (London, ONT/ H.B. Beal Secondary) looks to expand his role along with rookies Brendan Burke (Pittsburgh, PA/North Hills), Cameron Johnson (Pataskala/Watkins Memorial) and Bernee Sanchez (Columbus/Central Crossing) Transfers Jeremy Chambers (Marysville/Lakeland CC) and Axel Bueter (Wauseon/Bowling Green State University) will also be competing for time.

While 3B Collin Minor is the only returning starter in the infield, there is a lot of talent and depth amongst the group. In addition to fellow sophomore Ricky Kemp; Brandon Boazman (Chardon/NDCL) returns and looks to play more significant role as an option at both 3B and 1B. The middle infield will have several new faces including Julio Planell (Toa Baja, PR/Puerto Rico Baseball Academy), Miguel Ecarri (Valencia, VEN/San Agustin) and Sami Mehmed (Strongsville/Strongsville) competing for time. Additionally, freshman Dustin Redish (Hopedale/Harrison Central) who looks to play a key role on the pitching staff may also see time in the infield. Two talented rookies Garrett Robberts (Utica/Utica) and Matt Hilderbrandt (Bowmanville, ONT/Bowmanville) look to compete for time at 1B and possibly the designated hitter role.

Leading the pitching staff will be returners Mitch Cromley (Bowling Green/Bowling Green), Anthony Savarino (Olmsted Twp/Olmsted Falls) and Juan Perez (Cleveland/ James F. Rhodes) all who played significant roles last season. Cromley and Savarino both are likely to return to the starting rotation and Perez who was an all-conference selection looks to anchor the bullpen once again. Sophomore Danny Shaw (North Royalton/North Royalton) is likely to see an expanded role this spring after seeing limited innings as a freshman. The coaching staff is excited about a talented group of newcomers to pitching staff, which looks to provide more depth than last year's staff. Freshmen Noah Evans (Massillon/Jackson), Dylan Brister (Elyria/Midview) and Cody Gabriel (Upper Sandusky/Upper Sandusky), along with transfer Michael Martin (Lagrange/Mercyhurst NE, PA) are the leading candidates to fill out the rotation. Fellow freshman Anthony Lind (Columbus, Gahanna Lincoln) along with dual-threat players Axel Bueter, Brendan Burke, Cameron Johnson and Dustin Redish will provide the coaches with depth and options in the bullpen.

The 2017 schedule is loaded early once again with a difficult non-conference schedule that kicks off with a 5-game weekend trip to Emerson, Georgia March 3-5 featuring an opening-day matchup versus Georgia Highlands College (GA). After returning home for a week the team travels south again during its' annual spring break trip where they are scheduled to play 11 games against Louisburg College (NC), Wake Tech (NC) and Potomac State (WV). The home opener is set for Friday March 24th with a 4:30 PM double-header against Notre Dame College JV at Mottl Field and journey to defend the OCCAC title begins Friday April 7th as the Challengers are set to host conference newcomer Mercyhurst North East (PA) in a four-game series.

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> Statistics available all season long at <http://stats.njcaa.org/sports/bsb/2016-17/div2/teams/cuyahogacommunitycollege>.