



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 Motti 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.ncaa.org/sports/bsb/2016-17/div2/teams/cuyahogacommunitycollege>.



2017 EARLY SEASON RECAP

The Challengers are currently 6-7 early into the 2017 campaign following a couple trips south. On opening weekend, the Challengers visited the LakePoint Sports Complex in Emerson, Georgia to compete in the Perfect Game Spring Swing event. On Friday night the team lost to Georgia Highlands 12-3, before winning the nightcap 5-2 against Macomb Community College. On day two the Challengers once again took on Macomb Community College and Georgia Highlands, this time falling to both by the scores of 4-3 and 10-0 respectively. While the trip was not as successful as the team had hoped, the Challengers were able to salvage the weekend with a quality 10-6 win on Sunday against regional foe Vincennes University.

This past week the team hit the road south again, this time to North Carolina and Virginia for what was scheduled to be an 8-day 11-game road trip during spring break. To open the trip, the Challengers split a 4-game series against host Louisburg College. On Saturday the Challengers came from behind to win game one 7-2, before falling in game two 11-5. The story on Sunday was once again similar as the Challengers rallied from an early deficit to win game one 9-5; highlighted by a go-ahead extra inning grand slam by SO INF Ricky Kemp (Brunswick/Brunswick), but fell again 11-5 in game two.

Following an off day, the team was back in action again on Tuesday for a double-header against Wake Tech. The Challengers dropped a back and forth game one by the score of 10-8, but came back to split the day with a crazy 14-13 win in game two. Tuesday's nightcap saw a little bit of everything as both teams battled through unseasonably cold and windy conditions in North Carolina. The Challengers fell behind early, trailing 10-4 after just two innings of play. However, following a great relief outing by FR RHP Brad Suedkamp (Crestview Hills, KY/Dixie Heights) to keep the game close, the offense rallied with 5 runs in the 4th, 2 in the 6th and 3 in the 7th to take the lead. FR 1B Matt Hilderbrandt (Bowmanville, ONT/Bowmanville) had 2 of his 3 homeruns on the day in game two to go along with 5 RBI and SO OF Jim Parker (Middleburg Hts/Midpark) delivered a go-ahead 3-run HR in the top of the 7th. On Wednesday afternoon, the teams met again to conclude the 3-game series and the Challengers fell 9-8, dropping the series 2-1 against a quality Wake Tech team.

Winter Storm Stella forced significant changes to the backend of the spring break trip. Originally, the Challengers were scheduled to take on Potomac State in a 4-game series on campus in Keyser, West Virginia. However, after 6+ inches of snow fell in Keyser, the series shifted south to the campus of the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia. As a result of scheduling conflict and field conditions the series with Potomac State was reduced to a single 9-inning contest in which the Challengers came out victorious 3-1. Sophomore pitchers Anthony Savarino (Olmsted Twp/Olmsted Falls) and Juan Perez (Cleveland/James F Rhoads) were dominate all day long limiting Potomac State to just 1 run. A timely 2 RBI single by Matt Hilderbrandt gave the Challengers the lead in the 8th that they would not relinquish.

While the pitching staff has struggled to find consistency, the aforementioned Anthony Savarino has had 3 quality starts and Juan Perez has been lights out of the bullpen to pick up where he left off in 2016. Savarino has thrown a team high 18.2 innings with a 1.45 ERA, while Perez leads the team in appearances with 4 and has only allowed 1 run in 11.1 innings of work. Offensively the offense had been paced by SO CF Matt Starcovic (North Olmsted/North Olmsted) who is off to hot start leading the team hitting at a .409 clip, while FR 1B/DH Matt Hilderbrandt has provided some power leading the team in RBI's with 13 and homeruns with 3.

When asked about the team's results early season results, Coach Agona responded "While 6-7 is not the outcome we were hoping for at this point, we learned a lot about our club and what we need to improve on to get where we need to be when conference play begins. We put together a very challenging early season schedule, and showed when we played our best baseball that we can compete with anyone. We have a lot of new faces contributing and have already suffered a couple key injuries that we are trying to overcome. Like most clubs, when we throw strikes and make routine plays we have a great chance to win, we just need to start doing so more consistently."

This weekend, weather permitting the Challengers kick off the northern portion of their schedule with the home opener scheduled for Friday March 24th; a 4:30 PM DH vs. Notre Dame College JV. Friday's DH is the start of 19-game home stand at Ron Mottl Field, a place where the Challengers were an impressive 29-0 during 2016. 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.ncaa.org/sports/bsb/2016-17/div2/teams/cuyahogacommunitycollege>.



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>.



2017 LATE-SEASON REPORT

Similar to the 2016 season, the Challengers have caught fire in the month of April. Riding a 16-game winning streak and having won 28 of their last 30, the team has surged to #16 in this week's Marucci NJCAA Division II national poll. Currently 33-9 on the season and 11-1 in the Ohio Community College Athletic Conference the Challengers are in 1st place heading into a key series versus crosstown rival Lakeland Community College this weekend. The Challengers are set to host Lakeland this weekend with double-headers on both Friday and Saturday. 1st pitch is set for 3 PM on Friday and 1 PM on Saturday at Ron Mottl Field.

Over recent weeks the offense has exploded, and currently ranks among the national leaders in several offensive categories. 49 team home runs are good enough to rank 4th nationally, and 369 runs scored ranks 9th. The offense also ranks in the top 15 in batting average, on-base percentage and slugging percentage through 42 games. Individually SO OF Matt Starcovic (North Olmsted/North Olmsted) has lead the offense all spring. He currently leads the team in batting average (.460), hits (58), 2B's (15), and runs (48). Starcovic is also 2nd in HR's at 10 and RBI's with 46 and recently was selected as OCCAC Player of the Week for 3rd time in the last 4 weeks. Freshman 1B/DH Matt Hilderbrandt (Bowmanville, ONT/Bowmanville) is providing the power leading the squad in HR's with 12 and RBI's with 50. Freshman INF Sami Mehmed (Strongsville/Strongsville) has helped to set the table for the middle of the line-up hitting at a .412 clip and a .520 on-base percentage while also leading the team in stolen bases at 15. SO INF Ricky Kemp has been a versatile player in the line-up seeing time at 2B, SS, and 3B will hitting .373 on the season.

The pitching staff continues to be led by a pair of sophomores. RHP Anthony Savarino (Olmsted Twp./Olmsted Falls) has led the way since settling into the #1 spot in the rotation earlier in the year and LHP Juan Perez (Cleveland /James F Rhodes) continues to shine and be extremely valuable in a versatile bullpen role. Savarino leads the staff in innings pitched (44.2), strikeouts (41) and is tied for the lead in wins at six. Perez is tied for the most appearances at 11, and has the lowest ERA on the staff amongst regulars at 1.39. He has record of 4-0 to go along with two saves. FR RHP Noah Evans (Massillon/Jackson) has been the only other pitcher to remain consistent in the weekend rotation. Evans is currently 4-2 in his seven starts, to go along with a 3.60 ERA. Several others have spent time working in the weekend rotation including FR RHP Dylan Brister (Elyria/Midview), FR LHP Cameron Johnson (Pataskala/Watkins Memorial) and recently R-SO LHP Axel Bueter (Wauseon/Bowling Green State University). Brister is tied for the team lead in wins at 6, Johnson boasts a 3.63 ERA in 7 appearances and Bueter has come on strong of late. Last week Bueter was selected as OCCAC Pitcher of the Week after collecting wins in starts versus Walsh University JV and Clark State Community College. Finally, FR RHP Dustin Redish (Hopedale/Harrison Central) continues to work in the closer role leading the team in saves (4) and is tied with Perez for the team lead in appearances at 11.

While a string of success has positioned the team well for the stretch run, two key conference series remain. As mentioned earlier the Challengers host Lakeland Community College this weekend and next weekend travel to Sinclair Community College for a 4-game OCCAC series. Lakeland and Sinclair are currently in third and second in the conference respectively and the results of these two series will play a huge part to determine the conference champion. Although Coach Agona is pleased with the progress his young team has made since the early season, he knows that there is still a lot of work to do. "We have obviously been playing well of late with the run we are on, but we know that the conference series the next two weekends will decide our fate in the conference. Lakeland is having a good season and Sinclair is always a tough test, especially having to go on the road. We need to be ready to go and put together our best baseball over the next two weeks to achieve our goal. We have been dealing with several key injuries and are going to need to have some guys step up and contribute for us until we can get some guys back healthy. We have had a great year thus far, but are looking forward to the challenge ahead over the next couple weeks."

As the end of the regular season nears, the Challengers are looking to play deep into the month of May as the look forward to post-season opportunities. Be sure to follow the remainder of the season 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>.



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>.