

MMC Baseball Looking To Get Back On Track

BY JEREMY HOECK

jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net

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For a program that has won 88 games, won a conference title and finished second in a span of three years, expectations were understandably high heading into the 2012 season for the Mount Marty College baseball program. And for good reason. Mount Marty is coming off a 19-27 campaign a year ago — a decrease of 20 wins from the 2010 squad that won the Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC) title. So far this season (through games as of April 4), the Lancers are 12-16 overall. The goal this season? Get back to those contending ways. “We have a lot of people back, and experience is huge,” senior shortstop Jason Schmidt said. “That shouldn’t be a problem for us.

“With some of the new guys we have, if we can put it all together, we can be a really scary team.” That’s where what happened in 2011 can help a team, head coach Andy Bernatow said. “This game has an ability to really humble you,” the eighth-year coach said. “Last year was a good learning experience for us. The kids are eager to prove that’s not where the program is at. “Everyone knows the bar is higher than that.” To ensure the program bounces back, the Lancers will rely on nine seniors whose careers have coincided with the successful 3-year run. Highlighting that veteran group will be Jason Schmidt, the reigning GPAC Player of the Year and pre-season NAIA All-American. The Mitchell native led Mount Marty in home runs (13) and RBI (53) last season, and also went 2-0 with



ANDY BERNATOW • HEAD COACH

three saves as the team’s closer.

A potential Major League prospect, Schmidt is batting .329 with two home runs and 18 RBI so far this season.

More than just Schmidt, the Lancers boast another 4-year starter in Jason Livermont at second base. Livermont (.253, 8 RBI) allows MMC to fulfill a certain sports adage about titles and in-field defense, Bernatow said. “The goal is for (Schmidt) to continue what he’s done, but I think we’re stronger around him,” Bernatow said. “Championship teams are built up the middle, and we’ve had success because we’re very solid there.”

Around the infield, the Lancers return Jared Miller (So., .366, 34 hits, 1 HR, 18 RBI) at first base. “Jared has a lot to do with teams not pitching around me,” Schmidt said. “He’s dangerous.

Hopefully he can keep getting better.”

At the other two positions — third base and catcher — Mount Marty will see a few new faces.

Yankton native Derrik Nelson (So.), who had only 18 at-bats last year, figures to start at third, but will also see significant time on the mound. At catcher, the Lancers will use Brock Thomas (So., 6 at-bats), Kyler Pekarek (Jr.) and Connor Kortan (Fr.).

The outfield will be anchored by left-fielder Justin Kemp (Sr., .289, 24 hits, 9 RBI), who has started over 120 career games. Nathan Roche (Sr., .295, 7 RBI) will start in center and Mathias Godsil (Jr., .344, 21 hits, 13 RBI) will man right field.

Zach Hollenbeck (Fr.), Tyler Edler (So.) and Ryan Buck (Fr.) could also see time in right as well, according to Bernatow.

In terms of other utility players who will play key roles, the Lancers will use Allen Hemeyer (Sr., .242, 9 RBI) and Mike Johnson (Jr., .245, 4 RBI). Senior Sam Sparen will redshirt.

When it comes to who’s on the mound, the goal was simple, Bernatow said — the team had to improve.

“We had one of the best fall workouts I’ve ever seen,” said Bernatow, whose staff had a 6.37 ERA last year. “We knew we had to get a little better on the mound.”

Dominic Wieseler (So., 3-2, 3.41 ERA this season) will again assume the role of staff ‘ace,’ while Josh Engquist (Sr., 2-2, 2.18 ERA) and Hemeyer (2-3, 3.52 ERA) will also see significant innings. Nelson (1-1, 3.86 ERA) will also be counted on.

A pair of newcomers will give the Lancers a deeper feel this season. Cassidy Key-Darlington (3-1,



ALLEN HEMEYER • SR • P/DH

4.55 ERA), a junior from Big Bend Community College (Wash.), and Josh Cleveland (0-0, 4.15 ERA), a junior from Itasca Community College (Minn.), bring plenty of experience, Bernatow said.

Key-Darlington has the potential to be one of the best pitchers in the GPAC and one of the school’s all-time greats, according to Bernatow.

“We have a 6-man fight to get in that 4-man conference rotation,” he said. “We’ll be really strong mid-week, which is not always the case with some weekend-heavy teams.”

Picked to finish fifth in the GPAC pre-season coaches poll, the Lancers figure to again be tested for their conference championship bid. Three schools — Doane, Northwestern and Hastings — tied

for the regular season crown last year.

Being tabbed is certainly different from the pre-season No. 1 selection a year ago for the Lancers.

“Last year, we had that ‘X’ on our back,” Schmidt said. “We were the team to beat. Everyone brought their ‘A’ game against us. Pre-season stuff doesn’t mean a whole lot, to be honest, but we’re ready to make a move.”

Still, with Doane the pre-season favorite, the league race figures to be wide open, Bernatow said.

“We know Doane has the potential to be very good; they’re just well-rounded. They’ve got experience,” he said. “Even with how good Doane is, I don’t think they’ll run away with it.”

Schmidt

From Page 1

If that wasn’t enough, Schmidt has been even better on the mound. Throughout his career, his record is 8-1 with a school-record 22 saves and a school-best 2.67 earned run average (ERA).

Not exactly one to adopt a domineering or threatening presence on the mound, Schmidt says he has still learned to accept his role as a shut-down closer.

“When coach Bernatow recruited me, he wanted me strictly a closer. That was totally new to me,” Schmidt said. “I didn’t get a chance to close games in high school; I didn’t know how should be out there.”

From Mount Marty’s perspective, the timing was perfect. Since Schmidt has arrived on the scene, the Lancers have posted a record of 96-76, including the magical run in 2010 when the program came within one win of the NAIA World Series. “We felt pretty excited when

| JASON SCHMIDT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|------|-----|----|------|----|-----|-----|----|------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| MOUNT MARTY COLLEGE LANCERS • PITCHER/SHORTSTOP | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| HT: 6-1 WT: 195 BATS: LEFT THROWS: RIGHT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SIGNED: MMC - 3/30/2008 HOME: MITCHELL, SD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| HITTING | G | AB | R | H | 2B | 3B | HR | RBI | BB | SO | AVG | DID YOU KNOW | | | | | | | |
| 2009 | 38 | 91 | 22 | 30 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 18 | 24 | 26 | .330 | • Jason not only loves playing baseball, he loves to umpire it as well. | | | | | | | |
| 2010 | 55 | 176 | 72 | 80 | 21 | 4 | 8 | 51 | 48 | 25 | .455 | • He was a 2012 NAIA Pre-season All-American. He was also an honorable mention All-American in 2011. | | | | | | | |
| 2011 | 46 | 140 | 42 | 51 | 11 | 2 | 13 | 53 | 32 | 29 | .364 | • He was the 2011 GPAC Player of the Year. He has twice been named 1st team all-GPAC. | | | | | | | |
| 2012 | 27 | 76 | 20 | 25 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 18 | 23 | 15 | .329 | • He is currently in radiologic technology school. | | | | | | | |
| TOTALS | 170 | 483 | 156 | 186 | 46 | 9 | 25 | 140 | 127 | 95 | .385 | | | | | | | | |
| PITCHING | W | L | ERA | G | SV | IP | H | R | ER | BB | SO | | | | | | | | |
| 2009 | 4 | 1 | 1.57 | 12 | 6 | 23.0 | 14 | 6 | 3 | 13 | 30 | | | | | | | | |
| 2010 | 2 | 0 | 3.62 | 16 | 10 | 27.1 | 18 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 37 | | | | | | | | |
| 2011 | 2 | 0 | 2.76 | 10 | 3 | 16.1 | 14 | 5 | 5 | 9 | 25 | | | | | | | | |
| 2012 | 0 | 0 | 1.80 | 5 | 4 | 5.0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 5 | | | | | | | | |
| TOTALS | 8 | 1 | 2.51 | 42 | 23 | 71.2 | 49 | 24 | 20 | 39 | 97 | | | | | | | | |
| (2012 Stats as of 4/3/12) • led GPAC # - MMC record • ties MMC record | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

we got him,” Bernatow said. “We could see him being a good player, but he’s been amazing with what he’s done at every spot.”

Sure, Schmidt could have spurned Mount Marty for a bigger school, or could have gone the junior college route and potentially transferred to a Division I school after two years. Instead, he signed with one of the smallest schools in the region — knowing full well if he played

well, size wouldn’t necessarily matter.

“I had offers from other colleges, but I’d rather play for four years for a great coach, instead of sitting on the bench and maybe getting a shot down the road somewhere,” Schmidt said. “I don’t regret it at all.

“My mom seriously tells me all the time, ‘If you’re good enough, you’ll get noticed.’ I have to credit to her on that one; she’s right.”

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