

MMC Baseball Looking For Better Start, Finish

Lancers Hope To Defend GPAC Tourney Title

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Mount Marty College head baseball coach Andy Bernatow called the 2012 season, "A great story of perseverance."

This season, he was hoping for a lot less drama and a little more success, but Mother Nature had other ideas.

MMC (6-12 in 2013) returns five position players and two conference starters from a team that went 27-28 a year ago, using a run of 13 victories in 15 games to make the Great Plains Athletic Conference Tournament, then go undefeated in that tournament.

"It definitely was an interesting season, a lot of twists and turns," Bernatow said of the 2012 campaign, which saw the Lancers qualify for the NAIA Opening Round for the second time in three years. "We saw the lowest of lows and, in the same season, the highest of highs."

But Bernatow feels that this season may be even better.

"I know I say it a lot, but this could be a special year," he said. "We can compete with a lot of teams in the conference, and the conference looks as good as any year I've been here."

The success of recent years has the team hungry for more, according to senior Mathias Godsil.

"All the new kids know that it is expected for Mount Marty to be a winning organization," he said. "It is expected that we can do well in the GPAC and go on in the national tournament."

Two members of last season's regular rotation, senior Cassidy Key-Darlington (2-1, 4.67 ERA, 19K in 27 IP) and Dominic Wieseler (1-1, 4.35 ERA, 27 K in 20 2/3 IP), return to anchor the Lancers' league starters.

"Cassidy threw as well as anyone in the back half of the season. Dom was throwing strong in the first half," Bernatow said. "The two of them can provide a lot of good innings."

Transfer A.J. Griffith (Great Falls, Mont.; 1-3, 5.48 ERA, 19K in 21 1/3 IP) and freshman Asau Rodriguez (Rapid City; 0-1, 8.16 ERA, 12K in 13 1/3 IP) have also looked strong in the early going.

"A.J. is coming off a great career at Miles Community College. At the junior college level he started, pitched in long relief and closed. He's a kid that wants the ball in his hand," Bernatow said. "We think Asau can provide for us at the varsity level. It will just be a matter of putting him in the proper role."

The Lancers will also have to decide what role to use pitchers Derrik Nelson (1-2, 5.20 ERA in 2012) and Josh Cleveland (0-2, 7.43 ERA, 11 K in 13 1/3 IP). Nelson started four games, but could be considered for the closer role vacated by the graduation of MMC all-time saves leader Jason Schmidt. Cleveland



LANCERS: Jared Miller (above, right); Zac Hollenback (below)

made two starts last year, but appeared mostly in long relief.

"We've got to figure out what to do with Derrik, conference rotation or close. We've got 25 games (before GPAC play) to figure that out," Bernatow said. "The question with Cleveland is, do we keep him in long relief or do we make him a conference starter."

One bullpen staple whose role is established is senior Josh Homme (0-1, 9.00 ERA). The left-handed specialist has 46 career appearances, just seven away from matching the Lancers' career record in that category.

Junior Brian Bartlett (0-1, 0.00 ERA), who got a key start in the Lancers' GPAC Tourney run, and newcomers Taylor Klapperich (Rapid City; 2-2, 3.86 ERA, 21 IP), Ben Elliot (Southwestern, Ore., CC; 0-0, 3.60 ERA, 5 K in 5 IP) and Bryton Carlson (Itasca CC; 0-0, 2 IP) will all be expected to compete for innings.

"If we keep our pitching staff healthy, we'll have an opportunity to be in games."

The emergence of Nelson, who led the GPAC with a .405 batting average, helped the Lancer offense a year ago.

"Derrik blew up last year," Bernatow said. "He led the team in hitting, led the league in hitting. He plays sound defense and has good legs — he gives us an extra spark on the basepaths."

Nelson (.250, 3 RBI), who earned all-GPAC honors at third base a year ago, moves back to his natural position of shortstop, filling the gap left by Schmidt's graduation. Also back in the infield is junior Jared Miller (.388, 9 doubles, 2 HR, 18 RBI), who earned second-team all-GPAC honors.

"I'm intrigued to see the type of season that Nelson and Miller will have," Bernatow said.

Miles CC transfer Michael O'Connell (.328, 7 doubles, 13 RBI) is a frontrunner to claim the open third base spot. Sam Sparen (.269, 7 RBI), who red-shirted a year ago, will get a shot to play second base as a senior.

"O'Connell was an all-conference player at Miles. He batted

cleanup there, and he will bat in the middle of our order," Bernatow said. "Sam was a good player out of Itasca. With Mike Johnson (IF/DH) finally being healthy last year, it made sense for him to redshirt."

Sophomores Ryan Buck (.324, 5 RBI) and Riley Stack (.240), who saw time as courtesy runners a year ago, could also be in the infield mix, as could freshman Alex Mueller (Yankton).

Senior Kyler Pekarek (.152, 6 RBI) returns behind the plate, with sophomore Nick Sehr (.333, 3 RBI, a converted infielder, and transfer Julian Cutolo (McCook CC) also potentially in the Lancers' two-catcher rotation.

"Kyler does a pretty good job of working with the pitchers, working with the other catchers. He's starting to throw better," Bernatow said. "Nick Sehr has a natural catcher's throwing motion, and in our conference you have to be able to be able to throw out runners. Julian swings the bat well, and will probably get a lot of bats as the DH."

Godsil (.348, 10 RBI), who earned honorable mention all-GPAC honors, and sophomore Zac Hollenback (.343, 5 doubles, 2 triples, 8 RBI) return to anchor right and center field.

"Godsil is a three-year starter who has a good arm and has done a good job at the plate," Bernatow said. "Hollenback does a good job of patrolling the outfield."

Carlson, Nik Davis (.286, 7 RBI) and Tyler Edler (.293, 19 RBI) could put themselves in the outfield mix, as could Cody Ulmer and Derek Blumenstock.

"Carlson looks like he can win the third starting spot but, if you look at our outfield in past years, we usually use four guys out there on a regular basis," Bernatow said. "With Carlson pitching, we may be extending that to five."

The Lancers opened the season by going 1-3 against NCAA Division I North Dakota at the Metrodome in Minneapolis, marking the Lancers' first-ever victory against a Division I program. MMC will also face Divi-

Date	Opponent	Time/Score
Feb. 18	North Dakota *	L 1-2
	North Dakota *	L 6-10
Feb. 19	North Dakota *	W 7-5
	North Dakota *	L 5-6
March 2	Valley City State **	L 5-6
	Valley City State **	W 6-0
March 3	Dickinson State **	L 4-5
	Dickinson State **	W 7-6
March 9	William Penn ^	L 8-13
	William Penn ^	L 1-8
March 10	Dickinson State ^	L 6-7
	St. Ambrose ^	W 7-1
March 12	Jamestown ^	L 8-9
	Jamestown ^	L 7-9
March 14	Valley City State ^	L 5-6
	Valley City State ^	W 8-7
March 15	Minot State ^	W 10-9
	Wayland Baptist ^	L 9-11
March 28	vs. Northwestern	DH, 2 p.m.
March 30	vs. Dordt	DH, 4 p.m.
April 1	vs. Dakota State	DH, noon
April 5	vs. Morningside	DH, 4 p.m.
April 7	vs. Midland	DH, 1 p.m.
April 10	at South Dakota State	3 p.m.
April 13	at Doane	DH, 1 p.m.
April 14	vs. Concordia	DH, 2:30 p.m.
April 16	at Dordt	DH, 5:30 p.m.
April 20	at Hastings	DH, 1 p.m.
April 21	at Nebraska Wesleyan	DH, 1 p.m.
April 25	vs. Briar Cliff	DH, 5 p.m.
April 27	at Dakota Wesleyan	DH, 4 p.m.
May 2-4	GPAC Tourn. (Hastings)	

Home Games at Riverside Field

* - at Metrodome, Minneapolis
** - at Spearfish
^ - at Tucson, Ariz.

sion I South Dakota State later in the season.

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MMC SB

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adapt to throwing at the collegiate level. According to Fernandez, all four prospective pitchers will get a chance to prove themselves.

"With the amount of games we are playing (44), more than likely all four pitchers will get some starts and they are going to have to be able to throw some innings,"

the eighth-year coach said.

Either way, the Lancers will know quickly how their season will progress as Mount Marty attempts to squeeze their entire conference regular season into the next six weeks.

A trio of Lancers are leading the way offensively thus far, as Lonneman (.444), Jamie Gregory (.368) and Cardenas (.308) are all hitting above .300 after the spring break trip. Bunde leads the team in runs batted in with four while Cardenas has knocked in three teammates in her seven starts.

On the mound, Katie Groteluschen has pitched nine innings and allowed just four earned runs (3.11 ERA) while Courtney Hansen has been the workhorse of the group of freshman, logging 19.1 innings so far with a 5.70 ERA.

If the Lancers attain their goal of finishing the year in the top eight in league standings, GPAC tournament play is in Sioux City from May 2-4.

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