

Aviators In It For The Long Haul

Butler looks to build off of a strong summer season

VANDALIA - Despite another GWOC North Championship and 16 wins against tough competition, the Butler baseball team finished the 2010 spring season much earlier than they had hoped. " Last year left a bad taste in everyone's mouth with our early exit from the tournament", said head coach Trent Dues. After graduating some very good players in Dillon Bell, Trey Clements, Dan Comes, Nick Hansman, and Matt Radominski the remaining Aviators knew they had to step up.

Dues, who enters his 17th season at the helm for Butler believes last season's tournament shortfall left his Aviators hungry. "I think the early exit motivated everyone to get better". Indeed it did. The Aviators' Crown Solutions summer team wasted no time getting back to their winning ways, finishing runner-up in the ACME State Championship to Anthony Wayne.

Coached by former Butler standouts Tyler Koch and Paul Holihan, who in the words of Coach Dues did a "super job", the summer team meshed well and had one of the best summer seasons on record. With the success of the summer season and the commitment shown by the players in the offseason, Dues believes this upcoming season could be a good one for the Aviators. "It was a great run and I am proud of the guys", said Dues. "Hopefully this success can lead to a fine spring season".

The 2011 edition of Aviators Baseball returns a number of familiar faces and introduces us to some new names from last season's freshman and junior varsity teams. On the mound for Butler will be North Carolina bound and three year varsity starter Taylore Cherry (Jr). Cherry spent the summer pitching for the Cincinnati Flames, where he had a strong season and has improved a great deal on the mound.

Joining Cherry on the hill will be seniors Chris Mayhill and Travis Hafer as well as juniors Kyle Fain, Austin Craine, Kyle Winkle, and Kevin Brackman. Sophomore John Myers will also add another strong arm to the staff. Mayhill, Hafer, Fain, and Craine were all instrumental last summer in Crown's tournament run, and look to be the front runners along with Cherry in the rotation this spring.

Behind the plate the Aviators have great depth in junior Lance Straley and senior Ryan Keeler. Straley did not catch during the 2010 season due to Tommy John surgery. Straley returned for summer ball and had a strong season, much like his freshman year when he was named an all-league catcher. Keeler has done a great job catching part time over the past two seasons, as well as playing outfield for the Aviators. Both guys bring a strong bat to the lineup.

At first base, Austin Craine, Nathan Martin, Kevin Brackman, and Lance Straley will provide a great deal of depth depending on who is on the mound. Craine, Brackman, and the sophomore Martin swing the bat well from the left side.

The Aviators have four middle infielders in Mayhill, Winkle, junior Travis Mullins, and John Myers. All four have very good hands, and all are part of the pitching staff as well. Pitching assignments will determine who is playing middle infield. Each guy also has the potential to be a solid offensive threat.

The "hot corner" at third, will also be played with shared duty. Chris Mayhill, the All-GWOC North Infielder will split time with Straley, Fain, and Brackman. Pitching and catching duties will again dictate the roles, but each of these guys bring a nice glove and good bat to the table.

The Butler outfield will consist of seniors Nate Barlow, All-Area Utility Player Ryan Keeler, All-GWOC Outfielder Dan Link (Jr), and All-GWOC North First Teamer Nathan Martin (Soph). All four do a great job covering ground and making plays in the outfield, not to mention the threat that each poses to opposing pitchers at the plate.

When pressed on his expectations for the upcoming season, Dues said, "If the guys continue to work hard and do not get too down on themselves when things don't go as planned, I feel that the sky is the limit". Dues went on to say, "It's not a difficult equation to figure out. If we pitch well, play good defense and score some runs I feel we can compete with anyone. I have been very happy with guys working their tails off to get better since last spring. I think it will pay off."