

Predictions for C.R. Washington baseball in 2011

Written by Don Taylor

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Strengths

Cedar Rapids Washington returns six starters from last year's team. The Warriors will combine six pitchers with varsity experience and four young guns to find options for their pitching staff.

Dakota Freese will be their ace on the mound. Anytime he is pitching there is a pretty good chance for a win.

Jordy Brown brings a .406 average into his senior season and will be a challenge to opposing pitchers.

Challenges

Warrior Coach Byron Schlotterback said he sees numbers as the primary challenge for his team this summer.

"Having a small varsity roster will prevent flexibility when making changes in game situations," he said. "Injuries could prove devastating, so we are looking for some young players to step up for us and compete at the varsity level."

Lost to graduation

Washington lost three very steady players to graduation. Spencer Thornton (.316), Colin Thorson (.306) and Saxon Dolan (.298) combined for 72 RBIs and six home runs last summer. They will be missed.

Proven players

Let's start with Freese. He has compiled a 17-5 record with 197 strikeouts and a 1.76 ERA in the last two seasons. Arguably, Freese is an elite pitcher in the state and Metro area and a great foundation for success.

Brown returns with his leadoff skills, as does Dan White, who led the Warriors with 31 RBIs and six homers last summer.

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The continued growth Sam Kacena, Zach Zingula and A.J. Puk, who had 23 RBIs and four homers as a freshman, should provide a solid core for the 2011 Warriors.

New faces

Schlotterback identified Robert Hogg as possibly the most hard-nosed player on the Warrior roster and pegged him as someone who is an extremely important contributor to the pitching rotation for the coming season.

Josiah Javier, pitcher/middle infielder; Max Versteegh, pitcher/infielder; Zach Sriver, pitcher; and Noah Dostel, pitcher/catcher/infielder, are all new faces who will have opportunities to make important contributions for the Washington team of 2011.

Expectations

The Warriors look to improve on their 11-25 season of a year ago. Washington will need to gel early and build as the season progresses.

Schlotterback emphasizes fundamentals, and Freese and Brown will provide quality leadership. As the younger players learn their responsibilities and team chemistry begins to emerge, I think the Washington record will be better than last year.

The truth is that any time Freese is on the mound, this will be a very difficult team to beat.