

Kirkwood signs 8 new baseball players

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kirkwood baseball coach Todd Rima is intrigued by the prospect of having a 6-foot-8 pitcher on the mound with his long arms, long legs and 88 mph fastball.

His name is Nick Bruno and he hails from Boylan Central Catholic High School in Rockford, Ill. He won't be here this season, but he's on his way for the 2015 campaign.

Rima has signed eight high school seniors to letters-of-intent for the 2015 season.

"Bruno is probably the most intriguing guy in our recruiting class," said Rima. "I cannot wait to see where he's at in two years.

"He's kind of the sleeper in this class. In the long run, we might have stolen one."

The Eagles also have signed Toran Shahidi, Zach Morrissey, Ryan Belk, Brandon Brittain, Inoel Nunez, Luke Hassman and Kolton Smith. Rima plans to sign more players in the months ahead as he rebuilds the Kirkwood program.

"We have plenty of work to do yet, but we're off to a great start," said Rima, entering his second season with the Eagles. "I think we got eight great baseball players that are very good students, good people and are really excited about being Kirkwood Eagles."

Five of the eight new players are pitchers. Several of them can play other positions.

"That was a key with this class," said Rima. "We need to continue to find more arms that are ready to pitch right away for us."

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Shahidi is a catcher and utility player from Ames High School.

"Shahidi is the type of catcher you're looking for," said Rima. "He can catch and throw, unbelievable leader, unbelievable work ethic, has energy like I've never seen. His ticker goes. I can't wait for him to come in and be a leader right away as a freshman."

Morrissey is a pitcher and third baseman from Ankeny High School. He had a 4-0 record and 1.75 ERA as Ankeny reached the Class 4A state tournament. "He's somebody who can step in right away and be ready to pitch," said Rima.

Belk, a pitcher and middle infielder from Davenport Assumption, will be the third brother in his family to play for Kirkwood. He helped Assumption reach the Class 3A state championship game and has an 86 mph fastball and good slider.

"Kirkwood has been fortunate to have all the Belk boys," said Rima. "They've all had success. I remember coaching against them (at NIACC). I'm glad they're on our side now."

Jason Belk, one of Ryan's older brothers, is a member of the Kirkwood coaching staff.

Brittain is a pitcher and shortstop from Van Meter High School. He was the Class 1A Player of the Year, leading Van Meter to the state semifinals. He led the state with 16 home runs and was 9-1 with a 1.58 ERA. He also was all-state in football.

"He's the kind of small-town kid that gets overlooked a little bit, but he is very gifted," said Rima. "And he's another kid that knows how to win."

Nunez is a catcher, third baseman and pitcher from the Bronx, N.Y., who attends Monroe Academy for Business & Law. His high school team went 44-2 last year. Two of his former high school teammates are currently at Kirkwood.

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"They are your best recruiters," said Rima. "You treat people right, you develop them."

Hassman is a first baseman, third baseman and outfielder from Altoona who attends Southeast Polk. Smith is an outfielder from South Tama High School who hit .390 last year.

"This is an impact group for us," said Rima. "This is the type of class that we need to get where we need to be."

Kirkwood finished 30-14 overall last year and was 13-11 in the ICCAC. The Eagles are scheduled to open the 2014 campaign in St. Louis on March 1-2.