

Puk leads Warriors into new campaign

Written by Don Taylor

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A.J. Puk is the leading player returning on this Washington team that went 16-22 last summer.

Puk is identified by ESPN as number 39 on the top-60 list of high school seniors in the nation. His .436 average is the best of all returning Metro players.

Puk struck out 58 batters in just 30 innings on the mound in 2011. He will be a force to be reckoned with. The Warriors also have the Dostal brothers - Grant and Noah - who with Puk will provide the core of the 2012 Washington baseball team.

The other story at Washington is new coach Tony Lombardi. Lombardi has served as the Warrior football coach and has now added baseball to his coaching duties.

Key Losses:

Leadoff man Jordy Brown hit .466, stole 30 bases and scored 39 runs. Brown, Cole Rhatigan, Sam Kacena, Dan White, Zach Zingula and Mike Troendle accounted for 66 percent of the Warrior hits, 58 percent of the runs, 63 percent of the RBIs and all but two of the team's home runs. The loss of these outstanding seniors will be problematic for the 2012 team.

Key Returning Players:

Puk drove in 26 runs last season and Noah Dostal hit .358 and drove in 22. Also returning are

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Grant Dostal, Robert Hogg, Jacob Hand, Will Rings and Noah Burdt, none of whom had more than 61 plate appearances.

Grant Dostal (5-2, 3.12) and Puk (1-5, 4.90) had 40 and 30 innings, respectively, of varsity pitching experience in 2011. Hogg (2-1, 5.11) also saw 25 innings of work last summer.

Eight of 15 varsity players graduated, there's a new coach and some participation shortages create a great amount of fluidity for playing time at Washington this summer.

Outlook:

Puk, the Dostals and Hogg are good ballplayers and will contribute. After that we are looking at a lot of questions.

The word is that Lombardi has increased the number of participants in baseball at Washington, but they will be players who lack varsity experience. If they can't protect Puk, teams will just pitch around him.

With Lombardi, we know the Warriors will be competitive and they will be focused. After that there are just too many questions that need to be answered.

Washington could have a crop of good young players who will develop throughout the season, or not. We will know soon.