

Rima signs 8 for Kirkwood baseball

Written by Jim Ecker

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Todd Rima plans to build the Kirkwood baseball program with players from his own back yard, but he'll also search far and wide for top-notch talent.

That philosophy is reflected in his first full recruiting class with the Eagles.

Rima has signed eight players to letters-of-intent for the 2014 season and the new class is split evenly between in-state recruits and players from Colorado, New York, Puerto Rico and Australia.

"A little variety," he said.

"Every year, we want to continue to get more and more in-state kids," he said. "It's getting the right guys. It's getting the kids that fit what we're trying to do in our program.

"With the baseball that's being played in the area, that number goes up with Iowa kids."

Rima has signed Tyler Butz, a third baseman from Cedar Rapids Prairie; Cody Brandt, a left-handed pitcher from West Branch; Zach Patterson, an outfielder from Burlington; and Ryan Curtis, a second baseman from Southeast Polk.

He also has landed Austin Schmitt, a shortstop and catcher from Highlands Ranch High School in Colorado; Jeffrey Castillo, a right-handed pitcher from Monroe Camps High School in the

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Bronx, N.Y.; Sulliam Reyes, a shortstop from Caguas, Puerto Rico; and Hayden Sloane, a catcher and right-handed pitcher from Perth City, Australia.

Rima is not done yet. He'd like to sign two more pitchers and another hitter to letters-of-intent. He'd also like to bring in a solid group of walk-ons for 2014.

"We'll have 15 new kids in the program, roughly," he said. "We have a few holes we need to try and replace. That's kind of our goal going into it."

Rima said he'll consider transfers from other junior colleges and four-year schools. "We're going to continue to work," he said. "And yes, our ears are always open for the right guy."

Kirkwood finished 30-16 overall and 13-11 in the ICCAC conference in Rima's first year as head coach. He said approximately 20 players from this year's team are expected to return next year.

Butz hit .331 with 10 doubles and 35 RBIs last season for Prairie as a junior.

"I think he's got a great future," said Rima. "I think he has a chance to be a very special hitter.

"What I like is, Tyler is excited about Kirkwood. I want the local kids to buy into what Tyler has bought into.

"One of the better players in the area coming to our program means a lot," said Rima. "It's going to help us to grow with the local kids."

Brandt compiled a 6-4 record with a 2.06 ERA at West Branch last season with 107 strikeouts in 71.1 innings. Patterson hit .402 with seven doubles and 18 RBIs at Burlington. Curtis hit .358 with 13 doubles and 46 RBIs at Southeast Polk.

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Schmitt hit .380 with six doubles and three triples in 16 games at Highlands Ranch (Colo.). Castillo has been clocked in the upper 80's at his high school in New York, which had a 40-1 record at last report.

Reyes, the shortstop from Puerto Rico, has received high grades in Perfect Game USA scouting reports. Rima has watched videos of Reyes and likes what he's seen.

"You can tell he fits what we're trying to do up the middle," said Rima. "We're very excited about what he can do."

Sloane, from Australia, plays for the Perth Heat and will be playing in the United States this summer.

"I'm excited about the guys we've got," said Rima. "I think they fit what we're trying to do."

"They play the game the way we want the game played. A lot of them coming from winning programs. I think those are things that are important."