

Rima excited about new club at Kirkwood

Written by Jim Ecker

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Todd Rima compiled an excellent record during his 11 years as the baseball coach at NIACC, with 358 victories and three finishes in the top-15 in the national polls.

Now he hopes to build on that success as the new coach at Kirkwood Community College.

The Eagles open the 2013 season Monday with a doubleheader against the College of DuPage (Ill.) in the Metrodome in Minneapolis at 7:30 p.m.

Kirkwood slipped to 21-33 last season under Tim Evans, but Rima hopes to recapture the level of success the Eagles enjoyed under former coach John Lewis.

Rima has only eight returning players on his 33-man roster, but thinks he'll have a competitive ballclub this year. "We will put a team on the field that has a chance to win every single day," he said.

Rima grew up in Oelwein and enjoyed a successful playing career at the University of Northern Iowa, where he was a four-year starter and two-year captain. He set school records for most at-bats, hits, doubles and runs scored, then served as an assistant coach at UNI for three years.

Rima has 15 players from Iowa on his roster at Kirkwood, seven from Puerto Rico, five from Florida and one apiece from Aruba, Massachusetts, Illinois, Missouri, New Jersey and Wisconsin.

He listed an opening-day lineup with Willie Feliz (Massachusetts) in left field, Jean Carlos Rodriguez (Puerto Rico) at second base, Dairo Gonzalez (Florida) at third base, Greg Brodzinski (New Jersey) at catcher, Roly Hernandez (Florida) at first base, Angel Merced (Puerto Rico) at designated hitter, Dennis Colon (Puerto Rico) at shortstop, Milton Croes (Aruba) in right field and Shawn Hagarty (Cedar Falls) in center field.

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Collin Belk (Davenport) is the scheduled starting pitcher for the first game.

Rima likes his team.

"I think we're very good up the middle. We have three outstanding catchers. Our two corner infielders are very good," he said.

"I really like us defensively. I think we have a chance to be pretty special offensively," he added. "The key to us is, can we develop pitching depth?"

Rima listed his top pitchers as Belk, Anthony Gagliardi (Cedar Rapids Prairie), Brian Daphney (Florida), Cale Henke (Hudson), Mike Amador (Florida), Jean Carlos Rosario (Puerto Rico) and Tony Bakeris (Davenport).

Belk compiled a 6-6 record with a 4.98 ERA for Kirkwood last season. Rosario was 3-4 with a 4.80 ERA, Amador was 2-2 with a 4.39 ERA and Bakeris was 1-2 with a 4.24 ERA.

"We've got eight guys right now that I feel are ready to pitch at the collegiate level," said Rima. "To what level, that's yet to be determined. I think we have some guys with great potential.

"Are they ready to handle it mentally at this level? You don't know until they get out there and get into a game situation."

Gonzalez, the third baseman and No.3 batter, hit .373 with 13 homers and 51 RBIs for Kirkwood last season. Brodzinski, the new catcher and cleanup hitter, was considered one of the top high school catchers in the country in 2010 when he hit .510 with 11 homers and 47 RBIs for his team in New Jersey.

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Brodzinski appeared in 10 games as a true freshman at South Carolina in 2011 when the Gamecocks won the NCAA national title. He attended Coastal Carolina last season but did not play in any games, then transferred to Kirkwood.

Feliz, the left fielder and leadoff batter, hit .274 with 14 RBIs for Kirkwood last season. Rodriguez, the second baseman and No.2 batter, hit .245 with 18 RBIs for the Eagles in 2012.

Gagliardi, one of the top pitchers, attended Southeastern Community College after graduating from Prairie, then transferred to Kirkwood.

Gagliardi and Justin Hofland, another Prairie grad who is being redshirted this season, are the only two former Metro players on the roster. Rima hopes to change that in the years to come.

"That is our goal," he said. "We want the best kids in the area to play at Kirkwood. We feel there's no reason to leave town. I think it's our job to prove to them that this is the place they need to be.

"I think Kirkwood offers everything you need to be successful."

The Eagles will have three weeks to practice after Monday night's games in the Metrodome. They're scheduled to play four games in St. Louis on March 2-3 before heading to Florida for eight games March 15-19.

The home opener is scheduled for March 23 against Southeastern Community College.