

Kirkwood baseball headed for chilly weekend

Written by Jim Ecker

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It was 66 degrees in Kansas City this past weekend, but those balmy temperatures will be a distant memory by the time the Kirkwood Community College baseball team gets there this week to begin the season.

The Eagles are scheduled to play a four-game series against Johnson County Community College in the Kansas City area this Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The forecast for Friday is for 47 degrees, but the high temperature on Saturday is supposed to be 30 and the high on Sunday is ticketed for 37.

Kirkwood plans to leave Cedar Rapids on Thursday and play as many games as possible. Coach Todd Rima and the Eagles feel they have practiced inside long enough.

"We're excited," Rima said Monday. "You can tell it's game week. We had practice last night and the energy was there. I think we're at the point where we need to play. Put them on the field and let them go."

Rima said he's excited about his young pitching staff, which includes 14 freshmen and only four sophomores. Sophomore Jamison Steege is scheduled to pitch the opening game, followed by freshmen Nick Drahozal, Austin Clemens and Emanuel Castelleno in Games 2, 3 and 4.

Rima likes the depth and talent on the pitching staff.

"I'm anxious to see how we respond," he said. "We're going to get a great test this weekend right off the bat to see where we're at."

Drahozal, from Xavier High School, has impressed Rima in workouts.

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"He has made a huge jump," the coach said. "His velocity is up, he's throwing a ton of strikes, his ball moves a lot. And he's confident. I think that's been the biggest change in him.

"He really believes in his stuff right now and he's been fantastic in practice. I can't wait to watch him do it in a game."

Rima likes his defense up the middle with catcher Hayden Sloane, shortstop Sulliam Reyes, second baseman Ozzie Adams and center fielder Zach Patterson. All of them are sophomores and will be among the leaders on the club.

"I love the way our defense sets up in the middle of the infield and outfield," said Rima.

Rima thinks Randy Perez will be one of the top players on the club as an infielder, hitter and relief pitcher. Freshman Bryce Grimm of Xavier is scheduled to start in left field. Rima hopes sophomore Tyler Butz of Prairie will blossom into one of Kirkwood's top hitters.

Kirkwood is scheduled to play its home opener March 21 against DMACC.