

OU looks to improve on area diamonds

By C.J. Rieck
staff writer

Graphically speaking, Oakland University's baseball team should be right in the midst of the Great Lakes Conference race this season.

An explanation is necessary: If you graph the Pioneers' last two seasons — their first playing baseball after a six-year absence as a varsity sport — then it becomes clear that if they can match the progress they made last year, they have a shot at winning the GLIAC title.

OU was 3-21 in the conference in 1987. It improved to 8-10 last year. Another five-game leap in the win column, to 13-5, and the Pioneers' record would be just one game behind last season's winning total (Ferris State won the title at 14-4).

Alas, calculations don't win conferences. Defense, hitting and — most of all — pitching make champions. Which is why OU coach Paul Chapoton, entering his second season at the helm, has set modest goals for the season.

AND ALTHOUGH he'd like to challenge for the GLIAC crown — the Pioneers were one of three teams with a mathematical chance at winning the title entering the final weekend last season — that is not one of them.

"I've set three goals," said Chapoton. "First, I want us to continue to improve, then I'd like us to play around .500 (in the league). And I'd like us to win 20 games."

Chapoton is careful in his predictions for the same reason he was hesitant a year ago: "What you have to look at is we still have just one senior in the starting lineup — Rob Alvin (from Birmingham Groves). We are still very young. We are predominantly a freshmen-sophomore team."

Indeed, 19 of the 30 team members are either freshmen or sophomores. But it isn't like it was a year ago, Chapoton acknowledged. "Everyone in the lineup has at least one year (of experience) under their belt," he noted. "Our starting lineup is as good a unit as any in the league, at least potentially."

OU sports

SO THERE is promise, anyway. Chapoton likes his team's strength up the middle, starting with junior catcher Dave Walczyk, a two-time all-GLIAC honorable mention choice. Walczyk hit .374 in '88 with five doubles, three home runs and 18 runs batted in, and he committed just two errors while throwing out 65 percent of the base stealers.

"I don't think anyone in the league is better defensively than him," said Chapoton.

Returning at shortstop is last year's freshman sensation, Tim Bradley. The sophomore solidified the infield in '88, committing just seven errors in 34 games while turning 16 double plays. And he hit .348 and stole a team-high 10 bases.

Tom Zeroni, last year's second baseman, is gone, but Chapoton thinks junior Tom Perkins, a trans-

fer from Macomb Community College, could be even better. Chapoton feels Perkins is a bit quicker and perhaps a bigger offensive threat. Perkins is slated to be OU's lead-off hitter when the team opens its season Saturday at Indiana University-Southeast.

IN CENTER FIELD, there's junior Randy Bailey, a great defensive player but an offensive liability his first two seasons. Bailey hit just .211 in '88 and .180 in '87.

Alvin, who earned all-GLIAC honors last year after hitting .321 with eight doubles, four homers and 17 RBI, is slated to start in right field. Junior Dennis Milobar (.282, three homers, 16 RBI), another honorable mention all-GLIAC player, will start in left. Ron Ciurla, a sophomore, could challenge any of the starters for playing time.

Sophomore third-baseman Mike Gunn was another outstanding freshman for OU last year. He hit .350 and led the team in runs (29), hits (41), RBI (20), doubles (nine), homers (five) and at-bats (117). Sophomore Dave Szpak (.285, two homers, 17 RBI) will split time between first base and designated hitter. Freshman Chris Bobo will share first base with Szpak.

Damon Salisbury, a sophomore, assumes a new role for OU this season. Last year, Salisbury served as designated hitter and back-up infielder; this year, he'll still be a designated hitter (he hit .333 with 14 RBI) but will also be a short reliever.

THE PIONEERS need all the help they can get on the mound. Chapoton knows it. His recruiting efforts fell short in the pitching department, although he did sign righthanders Mike Schibi ("He's developing, but it could take him a little longer") and Tom Vandermeer ("He should be our fourth or fifth starter").

The nucleus of the staff is senior

righthander Duane Moore (2-3 with a 3.06 earned run average; opponents hit just .212 against him), sophomore righthander Dave Kallist (1-3, 8.51 ERA) and junior righthander Pat Sadowski (1-4, 6.98 ERA). John Jacoby, a senior righthander, returns as the closer (3-0, 4.98 ERA).

"We're improved over last year, especially our bench," said Chapoton. But he would make no rash predictions. "We need our eight everyday starters to have solid, decent seasons. We don't have one guy who can carry us."

And Chapoton remained unconvinced about the quality of his returnees. "We're better because we're a bit older, more experienced and have more depth," he noted. "But we only have one player who's put two good seasons back-to-back — Dave Walczyk."

Until some of his younger players display Walczyk's consistency, Chapoton won't change his mind. "We have to see whether or not the progress we made last year was for real," he said.

St. Hugo girls bounce to title in CYO play

For the first time in the 49-year history of the school, the St. Hugo's girls basketball team won the Catholic Youth Organization Southeastern Michigan Title. The champs clinched the title with a 29-22 victory over St. Mary's of Redford and finished the season with a 24-1 overall record.

Stephanie Storen paced the winners with 17 points. Mary Helen Diegel scored a season-high eight points and Laura LaLain clipped in with four while playing outstanding defense on St. Mary's 6-foot-2 center Deirdre Wilson.

"In my 10 years of coaching at St. Hugo's, this is the most talented and most coachable group of young women that I have ever had," said St. Hugo coach Bob Storen. "They worked hard for this title."

St. Hugo controlled the game from the start and had a seven-point advantage at halftime. St. Mary's pulled to within one point in the third quarter, but couldn't overcome St. Hugo's lead.

ST. HUGO regained a seven-point lead then went into a delay game for the final four minutes of play. St. Hugo advanced to the championship game by beating St. Joan of Arc, 23-19, in the semifinals.

Storen again carried the offense, dumping in a game-high 14 points. Mandy French clipped in with four, Rebecca Calice finished with three and Diegel scored two.

Storen led the offense throughout the season, finishing with 505 points. She scored 116 in the final six games of the season.

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