

FPU Baseball lineup preview

by Meghan O'Donoghue

The Franklin Pierce University baseball team has been extremely successful since 1998 when Jayson King became the new head coach of the Ravens, who had been 8-21 the previous season.

At the end of the 2016 season King resigned and handed the team to assistant coach Mike Chambers.

In addition to losing the head coach, the Ravens lost starters Matt O'Herron, Justin Brock, Max DiTondo, Maxx Sheehan, and Kurtis White to graduation as well as starters Jay Jabs and Paul Covelle to the MLB draft.

Not many players with starting experience return to the Ravens. Although there is a lot of change, the expectations remain high. The team will be lead by coach Mike Chambers and these veteran players.

Head Coach Mike Chambers

Mike Chambers first came to Franklin Pierce as a player in 2003 playing under former head coach Jayson King.

As a player, Chambers collected two NCAA Regional titles as well as several Franklin Pierce baseball records before being drafted by the Red Sox in the 32nd round in 2006.

Chambers spent two years playing in the minor leagues and then began his coaching career. In 2010, he returned to Franklin Pierce to assistant coach under King. This will be his first season as the head coach, however there has not been many changes as far as the preparation goes.

"What we've done has worked and we want to keep that going," said Chambers.

The transition within the coaching has been smooth considering the only change is the absence of King. The biggest obstacle facing the Ravens was the amount of new faces in the lineup.

"Fortunately for us, a lot of them are game-ready transfers," said Chambers, "those guys are all older guys who have played before at this level and are going to have the production that you want to have."

With so many changes, it's hard not to feel pressured. However, Chambers says "I don't think there's any more pressure on us than we've put on ourselves in that past. We're used to pressure and it feeds us."

For Chambers, the responsibility of doing well comes not only as a coach, but also as a former player. "I think the biggest thing for me is that I'm also an alumni so I always want the program to do good," he said.

Miles Sheehan

Approaching the mound, senior pitcher Miles Sheehan kneels down and writes his late cousin's initials in the dirt directly behind the mound.

"He passed away eight years ago and was a huge fan of baseball. It's something I've done since he passed away and will continue to do for the rest of my baseball career," said Sheehan.

That career has been impressive so far. Sheehan's Franklin Pierce career began after transferring in from Clark University.

"I had a great time at Clark University while I was there, but it just wasn't the right fit for me. I gained a lot of experience while I was there, but needed something more competitive and the Franklin Pierce program was exactly what I was looking for," said Sheehan.

Sheehan's first season for the Ravens was profound. He posted record setting numbers with a 0.29 ERA, the best in all of division two baseball. When Sheehan returned to the mound for the 2016 season, he had four starts before succumbing to season ending injury.

Although the 2016 season did not go as planned for Sheehan, the 2017 is already better than expected. "I feel great this year and have been lucky enough to be cleared by my surgeon six weeks earlier than expected so that I can play the majority of the 2017 season," he said.

Sheehan has not seen playing time yet. When he does, the game will begin with the initials in the dirt.

John Friday

As a freshman joining a team who has had great success with many returning players, the expectations to be a starting player are low. However, John Friday was one of few freshman to earn a start after an injury in the lineup.

"My first game was against Southern New Hampshire, our rival. That was one of our biggest games of the whole year," recalls Friday.

The experience that Friday gained during those nine starts his freshman year and in playing time since will help in his junior year as he becomes the starting third baseman.

After being named an All-Start for the Worcester Bravehearts last summer, Friday is expected to be one of the offensive weapons for the Ravens.

"We expect him to have a breakout year," said head coach Mike Chambers of Friday, "he's one of those guys that's been waiting in his turn. He's going to be one of those players that provides a lot of power for us."

Kyle Hood

A veteran presence will no doubt come from second baseman Kyle Hood this season.

Hood was one of two veteran players mentioned in a pre-season interview with head coach Mike Chambers.

In his freshman year at Franklin Pierce, Hood appeared in 48 games with 44 starts. Now as a senior, he will return to second base for his final time as a Raven.

Hood's experience is one that will be useful to have. In his four years at Franklin Pierce, he has played in more games than anyone currently on the roster.

Stephen Octave

When looking into colleges, Stephen Octave knew that Franklin Pierce had something special.

"Before coming here I always knew that the FPU baseball was a dominant program and that they're better than most Division one teams in the Northeast," said Octave.

By the end of his sophomore season, Octave would earn his place as the starting catcher.

At the start of his junior season, Octave has not only returned to that starting spot, he has also earned a spot as one of the four team captains.

"Being captain is an honor. I have a responsibility to the younger guys on the team to show them how the team works," said Octave.

Chris LaVorgna

After an impressive recovery from injury, Chris LaVorgna has returned to the starting lineup.

In his summer league, LaVorgna, who has previously struggled with injuries, tore his ACL. An injury that would normally have more than a six-month recovery period, LaVorgna was off crutches and out of a brace by the end of September.

"I had that same injury at one point and it seems like it was just nothing to him," said head coach Mike Chambers.

LaVorgna has had no limitations and has actually seen more playing time. The last two games LaVorgna moved from designated hitter to play in the outfield for the first time since his sophomore season.