



Division III "National Coach of the Year" Dennis Martel Moves the Titans Toward 2011 Season

Submitted by Stew Salowitz, Illinois Wesleyan Sports Information Director

Talk about a long season - the 2010 Illinois Wesleyan baseball season stretched to a full ten months long, into January 2011, since it began back on March 6. The actual season ended on June 1 when the Titans became the school's fifth national champion with a 17-5 win over SUNY Cortland at the NCAA Division III championships in Grand Chute, Wis. The seventeen runs is the second most scored in a Division III title game - Marietta beat Otterbein 36-8 in 1983. But since then, there have been awards, ring ceremonies and, most recently, head coach Dennis Martel collected his award for being Division III "National Coach of the Year" at the American Baseball Coaches Association convention in Nashville, Tennessee.

"This is a great honor. I'm pretty humbled by it," Martel said. "It was a great ceremony. It brings it all back."

The national championship win capped a Cinderella-like run through the final few weeks of the season to capture the crown. The Titans, with a record of 14-17 following an April 29 loss to Concordia Chicago, won seventeen of their final 21 games, eleven of their last twelve and eight of nine in NCAA tournament play en route to the crown. The team faced elimination three times as the No. 4 seed in the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin tournament but prevailed to win, then swept the

Central Regional field, coming in as the tournament's No. 6 seeded team.

IWU had never won a game in the World Series before, going 0-2 in its only appearance in 2001.

"[The postseason run] was 19 days and 16 nights in hotels. It was just baseball and winning and excitement," said Martel. "It was one big, long road trip. I kept saying 'Every day we keep playing is bonus baseball.' It just never ended until all of a sudden we're playing in the national championship game.

"When I relive the whole thing and what happened day by day it brings a big ol' smile to your face. It was a 19-day period nothing could go wrong."

The Titans' season ended with a 31-21 record and, with 21 losses, IWU is the Division III champion with the most losses in a season. In 1976 (the first D-III championships), Cal St.-Stanislaus was the champion with a 33-20-2 record. In 20 of the 34 previous championship seasons, title teams have had fewer than ten losses.

Junior third baseman Jeff Grodecki was named the national tournament's "Most Outstanding Player" as he hit two home runs in the championship game and had 13 hits in 20 at bats in the World Series. Grodecki was joined on the all-tournament team by senior first baseman Casey McIntosh, sophomore catcher Mark McDermott and junior pitcher Jason Pankau.

Pankau, a second team preseason All-American for 2011, was the

most decorated Titan player last season as he was named to the third team of the American Baseball Coaches Association All-American squads, was the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin "Pitcher of the Year" and the ABCA Central Region "Pitcher of the Year." Two pitching victories in the



Illinois Wesleyan head coach Dennis Martel threw out the first pitch at the minor league Normal (Ill.) CornBelts game last June when the Titans were honored.

World Series gave Pankau 11 for the season, tying the IWU single-season record held by Nathan Knuffman in 1998.

A key factor in keeping the Titans relaxed was a "mascot" – a stuffed monkey senior second baseman Brett Moore bought late in the season at a dollar store near campus. The monkey enjoyed a prominent place in the IWU dugout and around the trophies from the CCIW Tournament, the Central Regional and World Series.

"The whole season we said this team had a lot of characters on it - you could make a movie. It was a lot of fun," said McDermott. "Ever since we got that monkey when we played North Central, we hit the heck out of the ball."

The Titan baseball team is the school's fifth national NCAA Division III team champion, joining the women's outdoor track teams of 2010 and 2008, the women's indoor track team of 2008 and the men's basketball team of 1997. (Martel was an assistant on the 1997 men's basketball team.)

"National champion Illinois Wesleyan. Who would have thought that?" asked Martel. "It's great. The adjective 'national champion' will never ever get old."

The win capped a banner year for the school - including baseball, 10 IWU teams were involved in NCAA postseason competition: football and women's soccer advanced to the second round; men's basketball went to the final eight and women's basketball to the final 16; softball won three games in the regional; men's golf tied for 15th and women's golf placed 13th in their national tournaments; women's indoor track tied for fourth and the women's outdoor track team won the Division III championship last weekend. In addition, IWU sent individuals to the NCAA championships in women's cross country, women's swimming and men's swimming.

