

# LINFIELD BASEBALL SEASON OUTLOOK

Editorial and photos submitted by Kelly J. Bird - Linfield Sports Information

**E**mbarking on its 2011 campaign in typical fashion, the Linfield College baseball team is armed with talent and high expectations.

The Wildcats' main objective is a familiar one: win the Northwest Conference championship to become an automatic qualifier for the NCAA Division III tournament. Last year's club claimed both the NWC and West Region titles, and went on to finish third in the Division III Finals in Appleton, Wis.

"Our goals always start with the conference championship," said head coach Scott Brosius, now in his fourth year at the helm. "We want to give ourselves the opportunity to play in the postseason and ultimately get to that national tournament."

The skipper is not alone in predicting great success for the 'Cats. In a preseason poll by the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association and d3baseball.com, Linfield is ranked No. 8.

Pitching and defense are the foundation of this year's club. Leading a deep pitching staff are reigning NWC Pitcher of the Year Ryan Larson and second-team all-league selection Robert Vaughn. Last season, Larson notched a school-record 12 wins, including two shutouts.

A trio of newcomers could also see significant time on the mound, including sophomores Zach Manley and Chris Mueller and true freshman Zach Brandon.

The outfield features a stellar cast as well, highlighted by junior Zach Boskovich. A second-team ABCA All-American last season, Boskovich hit .407 and set a Linfield single-season record with 17 home runs in 2010.

In addition to providing offense and defense, Boskovich will be



Zach Boskovich



Kevin Allan

relied on to provide leadership to a couple of newcomers in Danny Urness and Jacob Cheyne. Senior Gunnar Cederberg will also provide support in the outfield.

"We have great competition in the outfield," Brosius said. "We have young, strong players."

In the infield, senior Cole Bixenman and junior Kyle Chamberlain will split time behind the plate. Bixenman was a second-team all-conference honoree last season at catcher.

Overall, the club returns "a good nucleus" from a team that won a school-record 37 games in 2010, but must fill big holes left by last year's graduating class, including NWC Player of the Year Kelson Brown.

One player expected to step up to the challenge is junior Kevin Allan, who slips into Brown's former position at short-stop.



*Eric Evenson*

"He is poised and ready for the opportunity" to help the team, Brosius said of Allan.

Brosius also hopes that some of his new players become major offensive weapons. He listed Kramer Lindell, Nate McClellan, Kenny Johnson and Clayton Truex as players who can have an immediate impact with the bat.

Placing so much responsibility for offense on an unproven group of newcomers could pose a challenge for the 'Cats this season, particularly early on in their schedule.

"We have guys with the talent, but they need consistency," Brosius said. "Experience will be a factor. Some of the younger players are going to have to gain experience quickly."

Fortunately, a group of key upperclassmen is on hand to pass on valuable experience. In addition to Larson, Vaughn, Boskovich and Bixenman, seniors Eric Evenson (2B) and Dustin Smith (3B) are expected to help provide leadership to younger players.

The 'Cats will also benefit from the experience of their head coach. Brosius was selected as NWC Coach of the Year by his peers two out of the past three seasons, including 2010. A former Linfield and major league star in his own right, the skipper understands the importance of



*Dustin Smith*

# TEAM SPOTLIGHT

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competing in every game, and expects his team to do so.

"Our goal is to be as consistent as we can," he said. "The team that can maintain a high level of play and not have a down weekend is the team that ends up winning the conference."

Standing in the way of a second-straight conference title for the Wildcats are George Fox and Pacific Lutheran. The three programs have battled for the league championship over the past four seasons, with each school winning or sharing the crown at least once. Add to that an increase in overall talent in the league, and the path to the postseason will be anything but easy.

"There's some depth in our league. A lot of teams are capable of winning week in and week out," Brosius said. "Pacific Lutheran returns most of their roster, and George Fox will also be strong. And some of the building programs such as Whitworth, Willamette and Pacific are very dangerous."

The Wildcats open the season by traveling to Arizona in mid-February to compete in the Arizona Desert Classic. There, Linfield takes on non-conference opponents La Verne, Concordia (Texas), Cal Lutheran and Texas-Dallas. Following that first tournament, the 'Cats compete in the Lewis-Clark State Tournament, competing against Division II



*Linfield Athletic Director  
Scott Carnahan*



programs Western Oregon and St. Martin's, as well as host and NAIA powerhouse Lewis-Clark State.

Feb. 26 marks the start of home action at Roy Helser Field when the Wildcats entertain Oregon Tech.



*Head Coach  
Scott Brosius*



*Ryan Larson*



# LINFIELD BASEBALL LINEAGE

Considered one of the richest and most successful college athletic programs in the Pacific Northwest, the Linfield College baseball team has piled up 45 conference and district championships as well as a pair of national titles.

Along with a steady stream of talented and committed players, Linfield has had the good fortune of being managed by successful and long-tenured coaches. With its origins dating back a century to 1912, much of the program's success can be traced to continuity within the coaching ranks. Seven coaches directed the program during the first 14 years, but since 1933, Linfield has cycled through just five head coaches.

Serving two stints separated by a three-year hiatus for World War II, Henry Lever brought stability to the program with an eight-year run as Wildcats coach. Lever coached Linfield to its first Northwest Conference crown in 1947.

Legendary Roy Helser took over for Lever to begin the 1950 season and was the first coach to achieve sustained success. A former professional baseball player and member of the Portland Beavers of the Pacific Coast League, Helser coached the Wildcats for 21 seasons. During that time, Linfield captured fourteen Northwest Conference titles – including eight consecutively from 1959 until 1966 – as well as the 1966 NAIA national championship. Helser, for whom Linfield's home field is named, finished with an overall record of 316-199-6.

Following Helser as coach was Ad Rutschman, a three-sport athlete at Linfield who played his college ball under Helser. One of the most accomplished coaches in NAIA history, Rutschman won 242 games in thirteen seasons while coaching the Wildcats to six conference and seven NAIA District II baseball titles. After leading the 'Cats to the 1971 NAIA national baseball championship, Rutschman went on to become the only collegiate coach at any level to direct national championship clubs in both baseball and football. Linfield won NAIA Division II football titles in 1982, '84 and '86.

Taking over for Rutschman in 1984 was another former player, Scott Carnahan. Carnahan led the 'Cats to eleven Northwest Conference championships. From 1992 until 1996, Carnahan and the Wildcats held a stranglehold on the conference, winning five straight NWC crowns. Carnahan, the winningest coach in program history with 562 wins in 22 seasons, earned NWC Coach of the Year honors a remarkable eleven times.

After a storied 24-year coaching career, Carnahan moved into the role of pitching coach at the start of the 2008 season. Taking over the helm was assistant coach Scott Brosius, who played under Carnahan before an extended professional career with the Oakland Athletics and New York Yankees. In his first three seasons, the one-time World Series Most Valuable Player elevated Linfield to a preeminent level. Brosius' Wildcat teams have won two conference and regional championships and made two appearances in the NCAA Division III World Series. The 2010 club set the program-record for most victories with 37 and came within two wins of capturing the NCAA Division III championship.

From Lever, to Helser, Rutschman, Carnahan and Brosius, the Linfield baseball program has been a model of consistency and sustained success over the past eight decades. The Wildcats are seeking the program's 20th consecutive winning season this spring.



1989



2011

