

GREAT NORTHWEST ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

Contact: Bob Gup till (509-535-5291/Fax 535-5293/e-mail – bguptill@gnacsports.com)

Report No. 23A (Feb. 2, 2010)

Wolves Seek Ninth Straight GNAC Baseball Crown, Perhaps More

Great Northwest Coaches Poll	2009 Records	Pts			
1. Western Oregon (5)	34-14, 24-4	25	4. Saint Martin's	22-30, 15-16	10
2. Central Washington	18-18, 12-16	19	5. Northwest Nazarene	15-31, 8-23	9
3. Montana State Billings	24-28, 16-16	12			

(Note: First-place votes in parenthesis. Points awarded on a 5-4-3-2-1 basis.)

SPOKANE, Wash. - With perhaps the strongest and deepest pitching staff in Great Northwest Athletic Conference history, Western Oregon has hopes to make a deep run into the NCAA baseball playoffs this spring and possibly even contend for the NCAA Division II national title.

The Wolves are an unanimous pick to win their ninth straight GNAC baseball title, outpointing runner-up Central Washington 25 points to 19 points in the GNAC Coaches pre-season poll. CWU was picked to finish second by four of the conference's five coaches.

Western Oregon returns a league-best 19 lettermen, including 10 that have previously won all-league honors.

WOU's pitching staff is deep and talented led by Seattle Mariner draftee Blake Keitzman. Selected in the 15th round, Keitzman, who throws left-handed, was the M's highest pick from last June's free-agent draft that *did not* sign.

Keitzman, however, is just one of six former GNAC all-stars available to take the ball on the mound from fifth-year head coach Jeremiah Robbins (141-58).

"I am very excited about our pitching staff," Robbins said. "To get Blake (Keitzman) back was a shock. It is not very often you get a pitcher back that was drafted in the 15th round.

"His leadership this year will be huge. The great thing is his health. Last year he pitched on a knee that needed surgery. He got surgery this summer and looks to be in very good shape."

Last year even with a bad knee Keitzman posted a perfect 9-0 record and led the GNAC with a 2.08 ERA. Also back are Kirk Lind and lefty Jacob Pettit who ranked second and third in the GNAC in ERA with 3.04 and 3.48 averages and Jesse Nunley who won five games in relief and carved out a 3.68 ERA.

Adding even more depth to the WOU pitching staff are Michael Cusick and Michael Ward who were both among the top hurlers in the conference two years ago.

Cusick posted a 5-5 record and ranked third in the GNAC with a 3.22 ERA in 2008 before missing most of the 2009 season with an injury. Ward redshirted last year after winning eight of nine decisions and finishing fourth with a 3.28 ERA in 2008.

"Michael Ward returning is very promising," Robbins said. "We are still waiting to see where Michael Cusick is as far as being 100 percent, but he is close."

In addition to the pitchers, the Wolves also return three .300 hitters – designated hitter/outfielder Jason Moseby, third baseman Bill Clontz and shortstop Cesar Lopez.

Moseby ranked third in the GNAC in hitting with a .376 average, while Clontz, who won't be available until the spring quarter, ranked sixth with a .357 average. Lopez redshirted after finishing ninth in the conference in hitting two years ago with a .347 average.

In all Western Oregon has seven former first-team all-conference players on its roster - Keitzman, Lind, Pettit, Ward, Moseby, Clontz and Lopez – while the rest of the conference combined has just one – Northwest Nazarene pitcher-first baseman Jon Keller.

Moseby, Clontz and WOU outfielder/third baseman Kevin Boe, who ranked 17th with a .317 average, are among 10 .300 hitters returning from the 2009 season when 24 conference players reached that figure.

Keller ranked seventh in the conference with a .353 average. Also back for NNU is catcher Connor Rankin, who finished 19th with a .313 mark.

Returning for Central Washington is third baseman Kevin Schneider, who finished ninth with a .348 average and outfielder Ricky McKinney who batted .339 to rank 11th.

Infielder Matt Schoonover of Montana State Billings ranked 10th at .345. Saint Martin's has two returning .300 hitters – designated hitter Travis Jones and first baseman Michael McIver ended up 22nd and 24th, respectively, with .307 and .305 averages.

Six pitchers among last year's Top 10 in ERA are also available. In addition to Keitzman, Lind and Pettit, Saint Martin's Thomas DeBoer ranked fourth with a 3.69 ERA, while the Saints' Casey Mitchell was seventh with a 3.77 ERA. Brian Howe of MSU Billings finished 10th at 3.44.

Western Oregon, which is ranked 18th in the Collegiate Baseball pre-season national poll and 24th in the National College Baseball Writers Association poll, will get an early test this weekend when it travels to San Diego to face nationally third-ranked UC San Diego in a four-game series.

The teams play single games on Friday and Sunday and a doubleheader on Saturday.

Northwest Nazarene and Saint Martin's also make their season debuts this week. The Crusaders head to Hawaii for six games with Hawaii Hilo, while the Saints have home-and-home single games Saturday and Sunday with Pacific Lutheran.

Central Washington makes its debut next week with a four-game series at the University of Puget Sound. Montana State Billings makes its debut with a four-game series at Grand Canyon Feb. 24-25 before taking on Dixie State Feb. 28- Mar. 1 for another four-game set.

Conference play begins the weekend of Mar. 5-7 with Northwest Nazarene hosting Western Oregon on Friday and Saturday and Montana State Billings playing at Saint Martin's on Saturday and Sunday.

Central Washington gets the bye on the opening weekend before hosting NNU on Mar. 12-13.

TEAM CAPSULES

WESTERN OREGON Wolves

Head Coach: Jeremiah Robbins, Eastern Oregon '01 (141-68, 4 years)

Assistants: Matt Skundrick, Kellen Walker, Kellen Hobie, Sam Kirby

2009 Record: 34-14

Conference: 24-4, 1st

Returning Letter Winners: 19 (3 from 2008)

Returning Starters (4 position, 3 pitchers): Blake Keitzman (P, 6-0, 175, Sr., 9-0, 2.08, GNAC Pitcher of the Year); Jason Moseby (DH-OF, 6-3, 190, Sr., .376, 2 hr, 34 rbi, 1st team GNAC DH); Bill Clontz (3B, 6-1, 180, Sr., .357, 3 hr, 21 rbi, 1st team GNAC); Kirk Lind (P, 5-11, 205, So., 6-1, 3.04, 1st team GNAC); Jacob Pettit (P, 6-3, 200, Sr., 6-3, 3.48, 1st team GNAC); Garrett Breda (C, 5-10, 170, Sr., .298, 3 hr, 19 rbi, 2nd team GNAC); Kyle Boe (OF-3B, 6-2, 200, Sr., .317, 6 hr, 27 rbi)

Other Key Returnees: Cesar Lopez (SS, 5-11, 185, Sr., .347, 2 hr, 43, 1st team GNAC in 2008); Mike Ward (P, 6-4, 225, Jr., 8-1, 3.28 in 2008, 1st team GNAC in 2008); Mike Cusick (P, 6-1, 210, Jr., 0-0, 7.36; 5-5, 3.22 in 2008, 2nd team GNAC in 2007, HM in 2008); Jesse Nunley (P, 5-11, 180, Sr., 5-3, 3.68, 2nd team GNAC); Brad Carter (P, 6-0, 180, Jr., 1-1, 3.00); Joe Pratt (OF, 6-

1, 205, Jr., .286, 1 hr, 8 rbi); Brad Verstegen (C-IF, 6-0, 215, Sr., .258, 0 hr, 6 rbi in 2008)

OUTLOOK

With six all-star pitchers, Western Oregon will be especially dangerous in the latter games of any four-game series and in any post-season tournament.

In their *best* seasons, starters Blake Keitzman (6-0, 175, Sr., Roseburg, OR), Kirk Lind (6-0, 210, So., Vancouver, WA – Prairie), Jacob Pettit (6-2, 190, Sr., Orting, WA – Green River), Michael Ward (6-4, 225, Jr., Eugene, OR – South Eugene) and Michael Cusick (6-1, 210, Jr., Salem, OR – West Salem) have combined for a won-loss record of 32-7 and all have ranked in the top four in the conference ERA race at least once.

Keitzman was the *GNAC's Pitcher-of-the-Year* last year when he won the conference's Pitching Triple Crown leading the GNAC in wins (9), strikeouts (92) and ERA (2.08).

He held hitters to a .197 average. Among his wins was a 3-1 post-season victory over Sonoma State in which he allowed just three hits in 7 2/3 innings.

Lind had a spectacular freshman season posting a 6-1 record and a 3.04 ERA and allowing just 42 hits in 47 1/3 innings, while Pettit was 6-3 with a 3.48 ERA. He led the league in fewest walks per nine innings (1.00), surrendering just eight in 72 1/3 innings.

Cusick pitched just 3 2/3 innings last season, but was 3-1 in 2007 when he led the GNAC in ERA with a 2.79 mark in earning second team all-star honors. In 2008, he was an honorable mention pick going 5-5 with a 3.22 ERA.

Ward was the GNAC's best control pitcher in 2008, allowing seven walks in 68 1/3 innings in posting a 8-1 record and a 3.28 ERA.

Jesse Nunley (5-10, 185, Sr., Orting, WA – Tacoma CC), who was a second team all-star selection, pitched in 13 games, all out of the bullpen, winning five of eight decisions and posting a 3.68 ERA.

Also back on the mound are four other letter winners – Dustin Fulks (6-2, 190, Sr., Red Bluff, CA – Butte CC), Brad Carter (6-0, 190, Jr., Federal Way, WA – Decatur), Chad Lynch (6-3, 210, Sr., Winston, OR – Douglas) and Kevin Campbell (6-4, 205, So., Beavercreek, OR – Gladstone). Of the four, Carter saw the most action last season posting a 1-1 record and a 3.00 ERA and earning a team-best three saves.

Among the newcomers on the mound are lefty David Deutschman (6-0, 165, Jr., Junction City, OR), who was the Team MVP at the College of Siskiyous in 2007 and Oregon State transfer Logan Lotti (5-10, 185, Sr., Chico, CA – Pleasant Valley & Sierra).

Lotti is also an outfielder, which is where he saw all his duty for the Beavers batting .137 in 51 official at bats.

Four positional starters return from a team that led the GNAC in hitting with a .331 average and averaged nearly seven runs per game.

One unexpected loss, however, was first baseman Thomas McCarthy, who led the GNAC in hitting (.461) in earning *GNAC Freshman-of-the-Year* honors.

McCarthy transferred to a California JC in hopes of landing a Division I scholarship following the 2010 season.

Designated hitter Jason Moseby (6-3, 205, Sr., Bellevue, WA – Newport) batted .376 in earning first team all-star honors. Among his hits were 10 doubles, two triples and two home runs. He also drove in 34 runs, second best on the team.

Third baseman Bill Clontz (6-1, 180, Sr., Corvallis, OR) hit .357, slugging three home runs and driving in 21. Catcher Garrett Breda (5-11, 175, Sr., Bothell, WA – Everett) batted .287 and had three home runs and 19 RBI and was a second-team GNAC all-star selection.

Also back is outfielder Kyle Boe (6-0, 205, Sr., Burlington, WA – Burlington-Edison & Skagit Valley) who tied for the team lead in home runs with six and had 27 RBI while hitting .317.

Shortstop Cesar Lopez (5-11, 185, Sr., Walla Walla, WA – DeSales & WWCC) returns from WOU's 2008 team. In addition to hitting .347 to rank ninth in the GNAC that year, he finished fourth in RBI (43) and defensively had the second most assists (158) in the conference.

The only other returning player who had 50 or more at bats is outfielder Joe Pratt (6-0, 195, Jr., Monmouth, OR – Central), who hit .286 and drove in eight runs.

Seven JC all-stars are among the positional player newcomers.

Infielder Kyle Kanaeholo (6-0, 185, Jr., Kaneohe, HI) and first baseman/outfielder Brett Davis (5-10, 175, Jr., Clackamas, OR) were NWAACC Southern Region first team all-stars in 2008.

Kanaeholo hit .267 at Linn-Benton in the “wood-bat” league, while Davis hit .321 at Mt. Hood.

Infielder Grant Glover (5-8, 180, Jr., McMinnville, OR) and first baseman Daniel Johnson (6-4, 235, Jr., Beaverton, OR – Sunset) batted .388 and .324 in earning first team all-league honors last season at Mt. Hood. Johnson also had five home runs.

Infielder Aaron Headrick (5-11, 165, Jr., Cupertino, CA) batted .278 and was a second team NWAACC all-star at Skagit Valley. Infielder Eric Savage (6-0, 215, Jr., Canyonville, OR – South Umpqua) ranked fifth in his

conference in earning all-star honors at the College of the Siskiyous.

Two other newcomers are outfielders Andrew Irvine (6-1, 215, Jr., Temecula, CA) who batted .219 (8 of 39) in two seasons at Division I Loyola Marymount, and Daniel Dillard (6-3, 220, Jr., Olalla, WA – South Kitsap). Dillard hit .355 and had five home runs in earning first team NWAACC all-star honors at Pierce in 2007.

CENTRAL WASHINGTON Wildcats

Head Coach: Desi Storey, Central Washington '94 (394-432-1, 18 years)

Assistants: Abe Silvestri, Tanner Swanson

2009 Record: 18-28

Conference: 12-16, 4th

Returning Letter Winners: 11 (1 from 2008)

Returning Starters (4 position. 1 pitcher): Kevin Schneider (3B, 5-11, 190, Sr., .348, 3 hr, 17 rbi, 2nd team GNAC 1B); Ricky McKinney (OF, 6-1, 200, Sr., .339, 2 hr, 18 rbi, 2nd team GNAC); Danny Myers (OF, 5-10, 205, Sr., .280, 0 hr, 16 rbi); Kevin Walkenhauer (SS/P, 6-1, 175, Sr., .223, 1 hr, 14 rbi, 1-3, 8.25); Michael McCanna (P, 6-5, 180, Sr., 4-3, 5.73)

Other Key Returnees: Nate Wallen (OF, 5-11, 180, Sr., .349, 3 hr, 14 rbi); Jake Millbauer (P, 6-0, 175, Jr., .261, 0 hr, 6 rbi, 2-2, 11.50); Anthony Sanelli (OF, 5-10, 175, Sr., .260, 0 hr, 3 rbi)

OUTLOOK

Third baseman Kevin Schneider (5-11, 190, Sr., Spokane, WA – Mead) and outfielder Ricky McKinney (6-1, 200, Sr., Aberdeen, WA – Grays Harbor CC) are the lone returning all-stars for Central Washington head coach Desi Storey who starts his 19th season needing only six wins to reach the 400-victory plateau.

Schneider was CWU's No. 2 hitter last year and ranked ninth overall in the conference with a .348 average in earning second team all-star honors. He also had three home runs – one of four Wildcats to accomplish that feat – and 17 RBI.

McKinney was also a second team all-star selection, batting .339 with two home runs and 18 RBI. He ranked 11th in the conference in hitting.

Three other starters return for the Wildcats – outfielder Danny Myers (5-10, 205, Sr., Tumwater, WA – Tacoma CC), pitcher-shortstop Kevin Walkenhauer (6-1, 175, Sr., Yakima, WA – West Valley) and pitcher Michael McCanna (6-5, 180, Sr., Addy, WA – Chewelah & CC of Spokane).

Myers hit 280 and drove in 16 runs. Walkenhauer batted .223 and had 14 RBI. He also pitched 24 innings, recording a 1-3 record and 8.25 ERA. McCanna made eight starts, winning four of seven decisions and finishing with a 5.73 ERA.

Also among 11 returning letter winners – the fewest number of any team in the GNAC – are outfielders Nate

Wallen (5-11, 180, Sr., Bremerton, WA – Central Kitsap & Olympic/Shasta) and Anthony Sanelli (5-10, 175, Sr., Carnation, WA – Issaquah & CBC), who hit .349 and .260, in 63 and 50 at bats, respectively. Wallen tied for the team lead in home runs with three despite making only 16 starts.

Of the returning pitchers in addition to McCanna and Walkenhauer, only Jake Millbauer (6-0, 175, Jr., Kennewick, WA – Kamiakin), who pitched 18 innings and had two wins and a save, threw as many as 15 frames.

Three four-year transfers, including catcher Jake Hammons (5-11, 185, Sr., Snohomish, WA – Everett CC) from New Mexico State are among the newcomers. Hammons played in 18 games for the Division I school, going four of 31.

Shortstop Evan Churlin (6-2, 185, Sr., Monroe, WA), who was a second team NWAACC all-star two years ago at Everett, transferred from NAIA Bellevue where he hit .289 in 45 at bats. Pitcher Travis Stultz (6-2, 195, Jr., Lacey, WA – River Ridge & Pierce) was 1-1 in 9 2/3 innings at Lindenwood.

Nine players also transferred from junior colleges, including outfielder Brett Bielec (5-10, 180, So., Port Orchard, WA – North Mason), who hit .333 and was a first team all-conference selection at Tacoma CC.

Second baseman Keola Rubin (5-7, 160, Jr., Spanaway, WA – Bethel) batted .311 at Pierce College in 2008. Pitcher Bruce Hjellum (6-1, 195, Jr., Kennewick, WA – Kamiakin) was a second team all-star at CBC, posting a 3-1 record and carving out a 2.90 ERA. Second baseman Kelly Gau (5-10, 170, Jr., Woodinville, WA) hit .252 at CC of Spokane.

MONTANA STATE BILLINGS Yellowjackets

Head Coach: Chris Brown, Jamestown '99 (77-127, 4 years; Overall, 106-188, 6 years)

Assistants: Luke Wheeler, Jake Samuelson

2009 Record: 24-28

Conference: 16-16, 2nd

Returning Letter Winners: 12 (1 from 2008)

Returning Starters (3 position, 2 pitchers): Matt Schoonover (SS-3B, 5-11, 185, Sr., .345, 1 hr, 27 rbi, 2nd team GNAC); Brian Howe (P, 5-10, 180, Jr., 4-6, 4.44, HM GNAC); Archie Smith (P, 6-4, 175, Sr., 4-4, 4.72, HM GNAC) Patch Wirtzberger (OF, 6-1, 180, Sr., .214, 0 hr, 11 rbi); Chris Round (OF, 6-1, 210, Sr., .243, 4 hr, 16 rbi)

Other Key Returnees: Cody Clark (P, 6-0, 205, Sr., 2-2, 4.88); Brian Dukart (2B, 5-9, 170, Sr., .366, 1 hr, 13 rbi); Jeff Ridgeway (OF, 6-0, 190, Jr., .317, 2 hr, 13 rbi); Ty Sobieraj (C-DH, 6-2, 210, Sr., .229, 1 hr, 9 rbi)

OUTLOOK

Infielder Matt Schoonover (5-11, 185, Sr., Great Falls, MT – C.M. Russell) and pitchers Brian Howe (5-10, 180, Jr., Whitefish, MT – Loyola Marymount) and Archie Smith (6-4, 175, Sr., Palmyra, NE – Highland CC) are among five returning starters and 12 letter winners who will play this spring for Montana State Billings.

Schoonover was MSUB's most reliable hitter last year leading the team and ranking ninth in the conference in batting with a .345 average.

Schoonover started all but four games for MSUB, banging out 61 hits in 177 at bats and ranking second on the team with 27 RBI. He also led the team in assists with 115.

Howe, who is a lefthander, and Smith each made 12 starts and each won four games. Howe finished with a 4-6 record and a 4.44 ERA. He also led the team in strikeouts with 54. Smith was 4-4 with a 4.72 ERA.

Outfielders Patch Wirtzberger (6-1, 180, Sr., Havre, MT) and Chris Round (6-1, 210, Sr., Billings, MT – Miles CC) also return from last year's starting lineup.

Wirtzberger batted .214 and drove in 11 runs. Round hit .243 and ranked second on the team with four home runs, while plating 16 runs.

Jeff Ridgeway (6-0, 190, Jr., Billings, MT – C. of Southern Idaho), who was slowed by injuries, played in just 22 games and hit .317, driving in 13 runs.

Other returnees include second baseman Brian Dukart (5-9, 170, Sr., Billings, MT – Miles CC), catcher-DH Ty Sobieraj (6-2, 210, Sr., Billings, MT – Hutchinson CC) and pitcher Cody Clark (6-0, 205, Sr., Billings, MT – Jamestown).

Dukart batted .366 in 26 games, banging out 26 hits in 71 at bats. He scored 22 runs and drove in 13. Sobieraj batted .229 in 25 contests and Clark was 2-2 and had one save and a 4.88 ERA in 14 appearances, all but one in relief.

Among coach Chris Brown's recruiting class are two with experience at four-year schools. First baseman Kevin Zukaitis (6-3, 220, Jr., Omaha, NE) batted .198 and had 13 RBI playing in 40 games at Division II Truman State.

Three years ago Brian Hutchings (6-0, 190, So., San Luis Obispo, CA) was 1-10 in 19 appearances, including six starts at NAIA Southern Virginia. Hutchings spent the last two years on a church mission.

Thirteen players are transfers from junior colleges including third baseman Jaret Chatwood (5-10, 175, Jr., Red Deer, AB), who hit .400 at Colby (Colo.) to earn honorable mention all-star honors.

Four players including infielders Jonathon Crews (6-1, 190, So., Delta, CO) and Jordan Kessler (5-9, 180, Jr., Broomfield, CO) transferred from Northeastern (Colo.), which came within two wins of qualifying for the Junior College World Series. Crews hit .351 and drove in 16 runs while Kessler hit .283.

Other newcomers including left-handed pitcher Kyle Gieselman (5-10, 195, So., Sheridan, WY) who had a 1.82 strikeout per inning ratio at Eastern Arizona to rank 15th nationally among JC pitchers and pitcher Ryan Pollock (6-

1, 195, Jr., Butte, MT), who was a third team JC All-American at Miles CC.

Another Miles CC transfer is pitcher Andrew Sanchez (5-10, 180, Jr., Riverton, UT), who was 2-0 with a 3.30 ERA. Pitcher Jacob Vulk (6-1, 215, Jr., Helena, MT) was 1-1 in 15 relief appearances at Chandler Gilbert CC in Arizona.

The lone NWAACC transfer is outfielder Blake Nelson (6-2, 210, Jr., Vancouver, WA) who hit .234 at Tacoma CC.

SAINT MARTIN'S Saints

Head Coach: Ken Garland, Willamette '82 (22-30, 1 year; Overall, 7 years, 94-192-1)

Assistants: None

2009 Record: 22-30

Conference: 15-16, 3rd

Returning Letter Winners: 14

Returning Starters (6 position, 2 pitchers): Michael McIver (1B, 6-10, 235, Jr., .305, 5 hr, 24 rbi, HM GNAC); James Douglas (P, 6-0, Sr., 4-7, 5.77, HM GNAC); Travis Jones (1B, 5-10, 215, So., .307, 2 hr, 25 rbi); Luke Abbott (C, 6-0, Sr., .260, 1 hr, 7 rbi); Andy Cole (SS, 5-10, Sr., .250, 5 hr, 22 rbi); Matt Marcoe (OF, 5-8, Sr., .191, 0 hr, 14 rbi); Zach Leonard (IF-C, 5-7, So., .176, 0 hr, 6 rbi); Thomas DeBoer (P, 5-10, So., 2-3, 3.69)

Other Key Returnees: Casey Mitchell (P, 6-1, Jr., 4-2, 3.77, HM GNAC); Blaine Evans (OF, 6-1, Jr., .240, 0 hr, 5 rbi); Kaleb Wilson (OF, 6-2, Jr., .206, 0 hr, 3 rbi); Brock Peterson (P, 5-10, Sr., 1-2, 7.76)

OUTLOOK

Saint Martin's returns a conference-best six positional starters among 14 letter winners off a team that finished third in the GNAC last season, just one-half game back of second-place Montana State Billings.

The Saints also return two pitchers – lefthanders Thomas DeBoer (5-7, 150, So., Olympia, WA – Capital) and Casey Mitchell (6-0, 210, Jr., Olympia, WA – Capital & SFCC) – who ranked among the Top 10 in the GNAC in ERA.

DeBoer led the team and ranked fourth in ERA with a 3.69 average while starting 10 games and winning two of five decisions.

Mitchell earned honorable mention all-league honors and had a 3.77 ERA to rank seventh. He was 4-2 in 24 appearances, 19 of them in relief.

Also back from last year's staff is James Douglas (6-0, 190, Sr., Rochester, WA – Rainier & GRCC), who started a team-best 13 game. He won four of 11 decisions and finished with a 5.77 ERA. Lefthander Brock Peterson (5-10, 170, Sr., Olympia, WA – Black Hills & GRCC), who made 27 relief appearances and was 1-2 with a 7.76 ERA, also returns.

In addition to Mitchell, Michael McIver is the only other returning all-star for coach Ken Garland (22-30, 1 year; Overall, 7 years, 94-192-1).

The 6-10, 235 pound junior first baseman hit .305 and had five home runs and 24 RBI in earning honorable mention honors. Designated hitter Travis Jones (5-10, 220, So., Mililani, HI) is the top returning hitter for the Saints. He finished with a .307 average.

Shortstop Andy Cole (5-10, 160, Sr., Kennewick, WA) was a .361 hitter in 2008 when he earned first team all-league honors, but slumped to .250 last season. He did hit five home runs and drove in 22.

Other returning positional starters in addition to McIver, Jones and Cole include catcher Luke Abbott (6-0, 230, Sr., Winlock, WA – W.F. West & LCC), outfielder Matt Marcoe (5-9, 160, Sr., Renton, WA – Hazen) and infielder Zach Leonard (5-8, 160, So., Spanaway, WA – Bethel).

Abbott batted .260 and tossed out six base runners, while only allowing 15 stolen bases. Marcoe appeared in 45 of 52 games, starting 29 and hitting .191. Leonard made 32 starters and batted .176.

Outfielders Blaine Evans (6-1, 180, Jr., Camas, WA) and Kaleb Wilson (6-3, 215, So., Olympia, WA – North Thurston) also saw significant playing time, batting .240 and .206. Evans had 12 hits in 50 at bats, while Wilson was 13 for 63.

Five junior college transfers and five high school recruits are among the Saints' newcomers this spring.

Three of the JC players were all-stars. Infielder Cody Brooks (6-1, 180, Jr., Lacey, WA – North Thurston) batted .397 and had 31 RBI to earn first team NWAACC honors at Green River CC.

Aaron Johnson (6-2, 205, Jr., Seabeck, WA – Central Kitsap) was also a first team all-star at Green River. Johnson, who is listed as utility player on the Saints' roster, hit .307 and had four home runs and 38 RBI.

Josh Grenier (5-10, 180, So., Tumwater, WA), who is also listed as a utility player, was a second team all-star at Centralia CC, batting .293. He drove in 16 runs.

An addition to the pitching staff is Antone Saltvick (6-4, 215, Jr., Gig Harbor, WA), who was 4-2 and had a 4.56 ERA with Green River.

Another JC recruit is outfielder Andrew Elke (5-7, 160, Jr., St. Charles, Ill.), who hit .248 last summer in the Great Lakes Summer League.

NORTHWEST NAZARENE Crusaders

Head Coach: Tim Onofrei, Albertson '98 (156-243, 8 years)

Assistants: Eric Schaffner, Pete Troyer, Skyler Mantz, Cory Warburton, Jimmy VanBeek

2009 Record: 15-31

Conference: 8-23, 5th

Returning Letter Winners: 16

Returning Starters (5 position, 1 position/pitcher, 2 pitchers):

Jon Keller (P-1B, 6-1, 200, Sr., .353, 1 hr, 27 rbi, 6-5, 4.86, 1st team GNAC); Connor Rankin (C, 6-2, 210, Sr., .313, 4 hr, 36 rbi, 2nd team GNAC); Joel Oliver (3B-1B, 5-11, 215, Sr., .280, 8 hr, 28 rbi, 2nd team GNAC); Ty Windall (OF, 5-11, 175, Jr., .280, 0 hr, 15 rbi, 2nd team GNAC); Tyler Nicholson (OF, 155, Jr., .286, 0 hr, 9 rbi); Sean McDonald (OF, 5-9, 165, So., .280, 2 hr, 23 rbi); Charles Pollock (P, 6-0, 200, So., 2-4, 5.19); Ryan Brown (P, 5-8, 140, So., 2-4, 6.92)

Other Key Returnees: Ryan VanBeek (3B, 6-0, 205, Jr., .305, 2 hr, 14 rbi); Niko Hawes (2B-SS, 5-7, 160, Jr., .291, 0 hr, 4 rbi); Kalen Hruza (OF-P, 6-0, 205, Jr., 0-2, 7.06)

OUTLOOK

Jon Keller returns to lead an experienced Northwest Nazarene team after an impressive junior season during which he led the Crusaders in both hitting and pitching.

On the hill, the left-handed throwing Keller (6-1, 200, Sr., Eugene, OR – Treasure Valley) led the team in victories, winning six of 11 decisions; earned run average (4.86) and strikeouts (73 in 83 1/3 innings).

At the plate, the NNU first baseman posted a team-best .353 average to rank seventh in the conference and also had 27 RBI. He was awarded with first team all-conference honors as both a pitcher and infielder.

Keller is one of 16 returning lettermen, including eight starters. Its six positional starters ties Saint Martin's for the most among the GNAC's five teams.

Four of NNU's returning starters were all-stars. In addition to Keller, catcher Connor Rankin (6-2, 210, Sr., Shoreline, WA – Bellevue CC), infielder Joel Oliver (5-11, 215, Sr., Menifee, CA – The Master's) and outfielder Ty Windall (5-11, 175, Jr., Davis, CA – Consumnes River CC) were voted to the all-star team. All three were second team picks.

Rankin hit .313 to rank 19th in the conference and also had four home runs and a team-best 36 RBI.

Oliver, who split his playing time between the two corner infield positions, batted .280 and led the team in home runs with eight. His 28 RBI ranked second on the team.

Windall hit .280 and had 15 RBI. He also stole a league-leading 19 bases and his the only returning player in the conference to reach double-figure steals last season.

Also back from last year's starting lineup are outfielders Tyler Nicholson (5-8, 155, Jr., Vancouver, WA – Eastern Nazarene) and Sean McDonald (5-9, 165, So., Boise, ID). Nicholson hit .286, while McDonald batted .280 and drove in 23 runs. McDonald also stole eight bases.

Other contributors a year ago included third baseman Ryan VanBeek (6-0, 205, Jr., Yakima, WA – Riverside Christian), who hit .304 and drove in 14 runs in 26 games and infielder Niko Hawes (5-7, 160, Sr., Navato, CA), who batted .291 in 55 at bats.

Three of NNU's main starting pitchers, including Keller, also return. Lefthander Charles Pollock (6-0, 200, So., Boise, ID) made 10 starters, winning two of six decisions and posting a 5.19 ERA, while lefty Ryan Brown (5-8, 140, So., Eagle, ID) was 2-4 and had a 6.92 ERA in 12 appearances, eight of them as a starter.

The only other returning pitcher is Kalen Hruza (6-0, 205, Jr., Caldwell, ID – Vallivue), who was 0-2 and had a 7.06 ERA in 15 appearances, 14 of them in relief.

Of NNU's 10 newcomers, six are pitchers including Division I transfer Jesse Gwaltney (5-11, 205, Jr., Vancouver, WA). In two seasons at Seton Hall, Gwaltney had a 1-4 record and two saves and a 4.03 ERA in 37 appearances.

"Jesse is a polished pitcher who throws four pitches for strikes," NNU ninth-year coach Tim Onofrei (156-243) said. "He has already had success at a high level and his maturity and leadership will be huge for our club."

Jacob Hiler (6-0, 180, So., Mountain Home, ID) is one of four JC transfers. A year ago the left-handed thrower Hiler was 1-2 and had a 5.48 ERA at Blue Mountain. Also from Blue Mountain is infielder Cameron Louie (5-9, 165, Jr., Boise, ID), who batted .200 and had 11 RBI in 140 at bats.

The other JC transfers are from Treasure Valley – first base/outfielder Greg Christensen (5-9, 215, Jr., Rupert, ID) and pitcher J.T. Brodrick (6-6, 205, Jr., Casper, WY).

NNU also has five freshmen including redshirt infielder Kramer Uvila (5-10, 170, Bremerton, WA – North Kitsap). Of the remaining four, three are products of Idaho high schools.