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FORECA

Volume 18 Issue 3
Spring 2017

KEYSTONE'S *Summer Constable*

2016 Lorain County
Miss Softball

CLEARVIEW'S *Antonio Bennett*

2016 Lorain County
Mr. Baseball

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**WEOL FORECAST MAGAZINE
 SPRING 2017 PREVIEW**

A Publication of AM 930 WEOL
 Volume 18 Issue 3

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About the Cover:

Keystone's **Summer Constable** is the 12th Lady Wildcat to capture the Lorain County Miss Softball award. In her senior season Constable hit .582 with 11 home runs, 28 RBIs and nabbed a team high 20 stolen bases. Her average was the fifth-highest mark in the history of the Keystone softball program. While at Keystone, The Wildcats Shortstop helped her team to a 104-20 record, four Patriot Athletic Stars Division titles, three district championships, two regional championships and a state semifinal appearance.

Clearview's **Antonio Bennett** had a dream senior season for the Clippers before being named 2016 Lorain County Mr. Baseball. At the plate the clippers shortstop hit .652 with 35 RBIs and 43 runs leading Clearview to an 18-5 record and a berth in the DII district semifinals. This spring you can find Bennett on the field at the University of Toledo where he is continuing his academic and baseball career.



Welcome Letter, Spring 2017

A wise man once said, 'baseball is the soundtrack of summer'. Yes, my co-host of the WEOL Morning Show, Bruce Van Dyke, uttered those words of few years ago, and they still ring true today.

Welcome to the 2017 spring edition of FORECAST. Inside, you'll get schedules and the low-down on baseball and softball, from the sandlots to the stadiums.

WEOL AM 930 is proud to bring you Cleveland Indians baseball, select games of the Lake Erie Crushers, and a busy schedule for high school baseball and softball games from Lorain County.

Thanks to all of our terrific sponsors who make these games possible along with the managers, coaches and players from the majors to the minors and high school ballfields.

Play ball!

Craig R. Adams

Operations Manager/News Director
WEOL AM 930

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Kolczun & Kolczun Diamond Duel 2017 Broadcast Schedule

Saturday	April 15	Lorain @ Elyria	11:00am
Thursday	April 20	Amherst @ Midview	7:00pm
Saturday	April 22	Clearview @ North Ridgeville	11:00am
Monday	April 24	Rocky River @ Elyria Catholic	7:00pm
Saturday	April 29	PREBIS TOURNAMENT	
		Keystone vs Hilliard	10:00am
		Elyria vs Male (KY)	Noon
		Keystone vs Male (KY)	2:00pm
Thursday	May 4	Westlake @ Amherst	7:00pm
Friday	May 5	Midview vs Elyria Catholic	6:00pm
Saturday	May 6	Elyria vs Columbia	9:30am

Red - Softball

Blue - Baseball

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2017 High School softball preview

By Todd Shapiro

Lorain County softball fans are some of the luckiest sports fans in the state of Ohio.

Not only do they get to see top-level tournament caliber softball played at a ball field right in their back yard on an almost daily basis from late March until deep into May, they also get the chance to follow one, or sometimes two, of their local teams along the tournament trail all the way to Akron, the site of the Ohio High School Athletic Association State Tournament on an annual basis.

In 2016 Keystone made its 16th appearance at the state tournament, crushing Hamilton Ross, 18-0 in the semifinal before falling to Hebron Lakewood, 7-4, in the Division II state championship game. Meanwhile, Amherst earned its first trip to Akron, after winning its first district title since 1999, and lost a 1-0, nine inning heart-breaker to Teays Valley in the Division I state semifinals.

Both schools are looking to make a return trip to Firestone Stadium, a number of other local teams are looking to either stand in their way or punch their own ticket to Akron and AM - 930 WEOL will be there every step of the way.

Coming off a 28-5 season with 12 returning letter winners and with nine Division I recruits on its roster, **Keystone** has attracted preseason attention well beyond the borders of the Buckeye State.

The **Wildcats** were ranked No. 15 in the USA today preseason Super 25 and No. 16 in the MaxPreps preseason Xcellent 50. In

both rankings Keystone is second-highest ranked team from outside the traditional warm weather states where softball is a year-around sport.

Senior third baseman **Sammie Stefan**, a University of Maryland recruit and a first-team National Fast Pitch Coaches Association all-American, is the Wildcats' all-team leading home run hitter with 25 home runs. Senior pitcher **Lauren Shaw**, a University of Iowa recruit, had a 23-3 record last year with a 0.75 ERA, she also batted .360 with five home runs and 39 RBIs.

Keystone will have a couple of milestone wins long before post-season play starts. Keystone is one win away from becoming the first program in Ohio with 900 all-times wins and Wildcats coach **Jim Piazza** is nine wins away from win No. 400 in his 15-year career.

As impressive as Piazza's 391 wins are, they are only enough to rank him third among active coaches in Lorain County. **Elyria Ken Fenik's** has 514 career wins and new Vermilion coach **Bill Mathews** won 486 games.

The **Amherst Comets** are another premier program in Lorain County. With eight returning starters including honorable mention all-Ohio out-



ANNA NORRIS / CHRONICLE

Keystone team.

fielder **Sarah Miller** and the pitching duo of senior **Madison Spataro** (10-1, 1.36 ERA) and sophomore **Madison O'Berg** (15-5, 1.21 ERA) Amherst is hoping to repeat as both district and Southwestern Conference champions.

Coach **Lacey Reichert's** team went 25-6 last season and in the Reichert's first three years at the helm of the Comets the team has a 64-18 record.

Elyria High used to be one of those teams that you could pencil in for an annual trip to Akron, but since 2014 the **Pioneers** haven't made it out of districts. With seven returning starters led

by speedy junior center fielder **Macy Taylor** and senior infielder **Dierra Hammons**, **Elyria** is looking to repeat as Greater Cleveland Conference champions and make it back to regionals. In 2016, **Avon** and **Midview** were the **Comets'** biggest challengers in the SWC and both teams looks to be strong again this spring.

The **Middies** are coming off of a 21-9 year, returning nine starters. Senior pitcher **Lauren Landers** was fifth in Lorain County in wins last season and junior **Gabby Shackelford** (.417 avg., 23 RBIs) orally committed

See **SOFTBALL**, 5

Nick Abraham
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SOFTBALL

From 4

to Cleveland State after her sophomore year.

Avon (18-7 in 2016) will be young this year but can count on sophomore **Tina Clark** in the pitcher's circle. Clark had 0.75 ERA in her freshman year. Senior Dani Austinson will also share some of the pitching duties for Avon.

After a tough 2016 season things can only get better for North Ridgeville in 2017. The Rangers return eight starters and have one of Lorain County's best hitters in senior Addison Mease. Mease, a Tiffin University recruit, hit .547 with 31 stolen bases in her junior year.

Avon Lake only returns five letter winners from last season but coach Buzz Mullen always finds a way to make the Shore-gals competitive in the SWC.

While the Patriot Athletic Conference Stars Division is traditionally Keystone's private playground, there is a lot of talent

elsewhere in the Stars Division. Wellington returns junior all-district first basemen Hope Diermyer, who hit .427 last year. The Dukes were Division III district semifinalists last year and hope to be in position to make another deep postseason run this spring.

Black River is coming off of a season in which it went 16-9 overall and 14-2 in the PAC and is bringing back eight letter winners led by senior third baseman Bailey Scheck (.356) and junior infielder Grace Spencer (.358).

Brookside and Firelands will be looking to take different paths to the top of the standings. Brookside, under the tutelage of first-year coach Ken Collins, is a veteran team with 10 returning letter winners while Firelands will look to win with seven freshman on its varsity roster.

Over in the PAC Stripes Division Columbia is looking to repeat as both league and Division III district champions. The Raiders return one of the league's best hitters in junior pitcher Allison Bouscher. Bouscher hit .524 last year with five home runs. She also had a 1.78 ERA in the circle.

Oberlin had one of its best years in recent memory in 2016, going 16-12; and with its top hitter, senior catcher Olivia Pfeifer (.471, 32 RBIs last year) and sophomore pitcher Bryanna Revis, who recorded 111 strikeouts as a freshman returning, the Phoenix could be a 20-win team.

There will be a new face in the dugout at Clearview as Amherst grad Amanda Arendt is taking over the Clippers softball program.

After spending three years as an assistant at Keystone, Bill



ANNA NORRIS / CHRONICLE

Elyria's Macy Taylor.

Mathews is the new head coach at Vermilion, who was the head coach for three decades at Amherst, takes over a Sailors team that returns senior pitcher Becca Oates and senior catcher Kennedy Shreve as they prepare for the first year in the Sandusky Bay Conference.

Another team with a new coach is defending Great Lakes Conference champion Elyria Catholic. The Panthers have a strong senior class led by short-stop Sam Filiaggi, first baseman Bridgette Pronesti and third baseman Olivia Madera.

Lorain is the defending Lake Erie League champions and Coach Pam Jackson's team is hoping to make another title run this year.

Open Door Christian, Lorain

County's only Division IV and only independent team, returns a pair of .400 hitters in junior pitcher Hannah Kardar and infielder Lynsey Scheneman.

The highlight of the regular season will be the Prebis Memorial Classic. Seven Lorain County teams — Keystone, Elyria, Midview, Amherst, Avon, Columbia and Wellington — will take on some of the best teams from across Ohio. This year's edition of the Prebis is April 28 and 29 with games at LaGrange Community Park and Wellington Community Park.

Soon the shouts of "Play Ball" will fill the air again so get out and support your favorite team. Maybe you can even follow them all the way to Akron.



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2017 High School baseball preview

By Tim Gebhardt

There's a lot of anticipation for the upcoming baseball season in Lorain County.

With the warm February spring-like weather, teams have had the opportunity to get outdoors much earlier than normal this year. Several teams are very optimistic entering the spring season. It's a short six week ride through the baseball season in northeast Ohio, promising to bring with it, cold, wind, rain and even snow along the way. Two teams with some unfinished business have to be Amherst and Elyria Catholic. The Comets were eliminated at the Sweet 16 round while the Panthers, ranked as the 6th best team in the state in Division III, lost in extra innings in the Regional Finals, just one game from competing at the state tournament for the fifth time in school history. One area to watch for is the new pitch-count rule for high school baseball. That figures to bring more planning and strategy into the equation.

AMHERST: The Comets, 23-9 a year ago, are the defending D-I district champions, having defeated Avon, 8-4, in the final at The Pipe Yard in Lorain. Amherst lost in the Bowling Green Regional semi-finals to Anthony Whitehouse Wayne. Matt Rositano, in his fifth year, sees another potentially good Comet baseball team. Amherst returns nine lettermen including senior outfielder **Mark Harris**, who batted .422 with nine doubles, two triples, a home run, 24 RBI and 18 stolen bases a year ago. Pitcher/3b Xavier Moore, an Ohio State recruit, had a 1.93 ERA last

year with 30 strike outs and an opponent's batting average of just .196. Evan Shawver (outfield/pitcher) batted .330 with six doubles and two triples and had a 2.02 ERA with 35 Ks on the mound. He's headed to Nebraska on a scholarship. Others to watch include senior 1b/P Chad Jones, pitcher Brian D'Andrea (2.03

ERA, three saves), Hunter Cassidy (C-OF), and shortstop Ryan Glowacki. Rositano said his team needs to play good defense behind the pitching and get timely hitting throughout the lineup to be successful.

AVON: The Eagles, 21-8 a year ago, were ranked 18th in the state a year ago but were eliminated 8-

4 by Amherst in the D-I district final last year. Avon has been the top seed in the district the past two years but were knocked out by Amherst both seasons. All-Ohio outfielder **Ethan St. Clair** heads the returning cast for Coach Frank DeSmit. Right-hander Shane Docherty and lefty Logan Doenges head an experienced pitching staff. Seniors Taylor Reynolds (3b), Will Kocar (C), and Tommy Kocar (SS) will bring valuable experience to the defense. DeSmit is hopeful his senior cast will spell success for the Eagles again this season in a very competitive Southwestern Conference.

AVON LAKE: Kevin Marlow begins his 6th season as manager of the Shoremen. Avon Lake finished 16-10 overall a year ago and will have senior ace southpaw Justin Michlovic back to anchor the pitching. Outfielder Zac Sabol, a Shawnee State commit, will patrol the outfield while Brian Pincura, a .340 hitter as a junior, will be back at 2b. Dan Theberge (Of/P) and Jaret Kuhar (1b) are also being depended upon for good seasons. Marlow expects his team to compete for the SWC title.

BROOKSIDE: Fifth-year coach Brad Bomback brings back a solid core of players from last year's 9-11 Cardinals. Senior pitcher/shortstop Tim Ackerman and senior 1b Travis Fortney are the veterans that Bomback will depend on. Juniors Devin Houdeshell (C), Owen Rozanc (P/2b), Stephen Williams (3b) and Christian Fields (SS/Of) along with sophomore Matt Thompson (1b/P) are the return-

See **BASEBALL**, 8



Clearview's Dakota Stout

ANNA NORRIS / CHRONICLE



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BASEBALL

From 7

ing lettermen.

CLEARVIEW: The Clippers were 18-6 a year ago, losing to Bay, 1-0, in the D-II district semi-final. This year, Coach Dennis Pihlblad, beginning his eighth year with a 110-75 career mark, hopes his pitching comes together for another good run. Senior Andrai Wright hit .475 a year ago with 20 RBI and **Dakota Stout** batted .370 with 18 RBI. Stout will also be counted on to pitch. He was 4-1 a year ago with 42 strike outs. Juniors Jaquez Moon (.349, 19 RBI), Justin Lilley (.320) and Evan Berrios (.300) will also play key roles. Sophomore Avery Cruz is also returning.

COLUMBIA: Justin Ramsey has won 107 games in his nine years as manager of the Raiders, who were 15-9 a year ago. Columbia returns six lettermen off last year's team including senior pitcher Jared Heidecker (5-1, 2.13 ERA). Heidecker worked 48 innings a year ago with 62 punch outs. Centerfielder Cody Schwartz hopes to improve on his .392 batting average and 12

stolen bases from last season. Other returners include seniors Lance Boise (of) and Colton Demagall (3b) along with juniors Jacob Aniol (SS) and Matt Caraballo (1b).

ELYRIA: The Pioneers compete in the grueling Greater Cleveland Conference but Ed Piazza is optimistic with this year's team. Elyria was 8-16 a year ago but returns a solid core of seniors including Jordan Reed (RHP), Jamaris Cook (LHP), Devan Nail (SS and Kent State recruit), James Spicer (RHP), Javon Harvey (RHP), Seth France (C), and Freddie Weimer (LHP). Piazza is hoping the depth of the pitching staff will reap a rewarding season.

ELYRIA CATHOLIC: With hard-throwing All-Ohio and Nebraska recruit **Andrew Abrahamowicz** back on the mound, the Panthers' goal of repeating as conference champion and a return to the regional tournament and beyond a very realistic goal. Elyria Catholic is the defending D-III district champion and were one out and maybe one pitch from advancing to the last year's state tournament. The Panthers defeated defending state champion and

fourth ranked Canton Central Catholic in the regional semi-finals at Ducky Schroeder Field in Massillon before losing in eight innings to Waynedale, 13-8. Sixth-year coach Bruce Lisicky's team finished 24-7 a year ago and along with Abrahamowicz, return seniors Jeff Spencer (RHP/3b) and Tony LoParo (SS) along with juniors Ryan Strittmather (2b) and sophomores Grant McClure (C), Jack Laird (RHP/1b), and Leighton Banjoff (Of). If Lisicky can find some outfield depth, EC could be in for a very special season.

FIRELANDS: Dan Ransom (106-91 career record and third season at Firelands) brings back a load of talent for the Falcons this year. Firelands lost to Padua, 2-1, in the D-II district semi-finals a year ago. Firelands will return seniors Trevor Damron (P), John Gall (Of), Daniel Hribal (P/Of), Nathan Kovach (C) and Clayton Lucki (Of/DH) along with juniors Evan Lacy (P/Inf.), Aaron Myers (P/Inf.), Colin Ransom (C/Inf.) and Calvin Stull (P/Inf.) and sophomores Alex Brill (SS) and Austin Urban (2b). Damron, a Coastal Carolina recruit, had over 100 strike outs a year ago. Ransom feels the Falcons will be a fun team to watch this spring.

KEYSTONE: The Wildcats have a strong baseball tradition and are champing at the bit to improve on last season's 10-16 mark under Bert Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald is 76-38 in his five years at Keystone and returns 10 lettermen this year. Seniors Turner Campbell (Of/P), and Drew Compton (3b/P) were all-county and all-PAC respectively a year ago. Clay Todd (C), Cade Christoff (P), and Logan Rising (P) are returning seniors. Junior Austin Able heads up the outfield while sophomore infielders Matt and Kevin Mealwitz along with Cameron Emerick and Mike Mileski also return. Senior P.J. Prunty is back after missing last year with a torn ACL.

LAKE RIDGE: Jason Dimacchia's Royals are coming off an 11-9 season a year ago and face an ambitious schedule with the likes of Midview, Elyria Catholic, Keystone, Clearview and Wellington all on the slate. Dimacchia will depend on a solid core of returning players including sen-

iors Collin Harris, Eddie DePalma, Antonio Pineda and Sharad Patel along with juniors Jake Roach, Cole Bramhall, Ian Ashby, Jarrett Cromling, Brian Smith and sophomores Neil Robertson, Brayden Snezak and Will Cunningham. Dimacchia feels his team has the potential for a deep D-IV run in this year's tournament.

LORAIN: Brad Ternes begins his 15th year as head coach in Lorain. He started his career at Southview, replacing his legendary father Dan at the helm. Lorain was 15-10 a year ago and won the Lake Erie League with a 9-1 mark. Ternes will rely on seniors Savien Amador (2b), Jayden Kender (P), Julian Rodriguez (SS/P/C), Solomon Villarreal (3b) and junior Michael Clark (Of). Kender not only was 4-2 on the mound with a 2.05 ERA and 34 strike outs in 34 innings but he batted .333. Rodriguez hit .317. Ternes figures his team will rely on its defense having lost 11 seniors to graduation.

MIDVIEW: The Middies are coming off an outstanding 17-9 season last year under Todd Ratica but will have to rebuild with only five returning lettermen. Jordan Cavanaugh, Derek Delumba, Dom Fleming, Sam Butler and Jamie Myers all have varsity experience. Ratica will put a premium on good pitching and solid defense.

NORTH RIDGEVILLE: Matt Ponting's Rangers had a tough 3-23 season a year ago but should be very competitive this spring with nine returning pitchers. Seniors Wade Quintana and Chris Machovina along with junior Evan Truelson, Jeremy Jackson and Cody Reffert give Ponting some versatility and athleticism. Sophomores Cade Riley and Carson Schneller also had some varsity experience last year. New to the team this season are seniors Chris Brown and Bryon Shuey, juniors Jerry Vansickle, Nate Waugamen and Zack Chrosniak and sophomores Ryan Marflake, Liam Sotak, Mike Richmond and Nick Birt.

OBERLIN: The Phoenix are hoping to rebound from a 2-17 season under Lynn Gray. The keys will be six lettermen – infielder Joe Tatum, pitcher-infielder Chris Palmer, pitcher-

See **BASEBALL**, 9



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BASEBALL

From 8

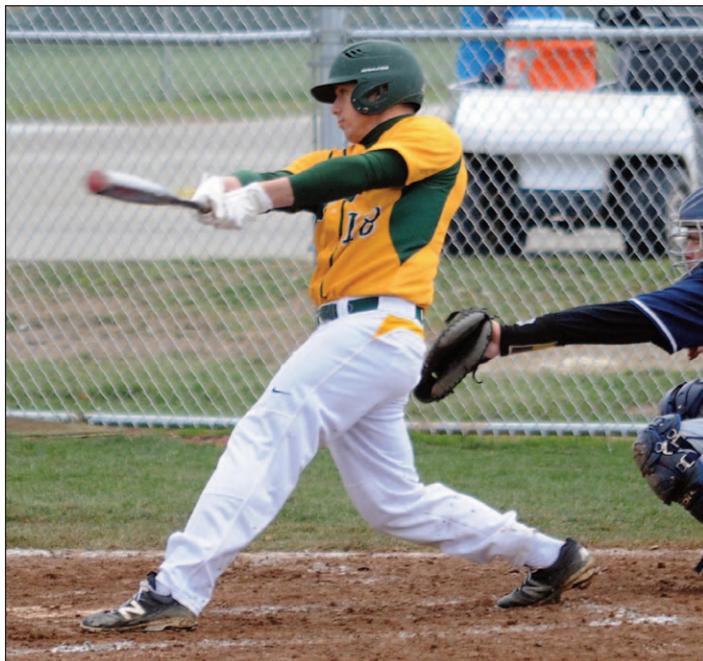
catcher Jackson Schaum, outfielder Matt Standfield, infielder-catcher-pitcher Rex Young and infielder Matt Rasmusson. Gray figures Oberlin's defense and pitching will be its strong suits this year.

OPEN DOOR: Pitcher Charley Lovett has led the Patriots in wins the past two seasons and has a chance to break Open Door's career mark for wins. Currently, Lovett needs just two wins to tie Kyle Beiswenger for the school record 12 wins. The Patriots were 12-6 last season and in addition to Lovett, return catcher Zach Strouse and 3b Jafet Hernandez. Manager Matt Loescher will depend on four or five freshmen to start on the varsity this year. Open Door is coming off three straight winning seasons.

VERMILION: Led by veteran coach Jeff Keck, Vermilion, 23-3 and ranked 7th in D-II a year ago, was the top seed at the Heidelberg District but were knocked out in the sectional final by even-

tual district champion Lexington, 8-4. Keck is nearing 400 wins as a varsity coach (394-267 in 30 years - 15 at Vermilion). The Sailors will compete in the Sandusky Bay Conference this year and return seven starters off last year's outstanding team. Vermilion has two outstanding pitchers in seniors Nik Barkdull and Tristan Mayer. Barkdull has a career 10-4 mark for Vermilion and had a 1.80 ERA last year and led the team with 64 strikeouts. When he's not pitching, Barkdull will be at 1b or 3b and at the plate, he hit .333 with 25 RBI. Mayer, who plays 2b when he's not pitching, has a career record of 11-2 and sparked a year ago with a 0.69 ERA with 54 strikeouts. Behind the plate, Nick Ragnoni returns with his .389 batting average and 27 RBI. Bryce Fisher is a two-year letterman at 3b/1b/of/C and batted .361 with 28 RBI. Sophomores Mason Montgomery and Reese Miller both had very good freshman years with the Vermilion varsity a year ago.

WELLINGTON: Roger Sasack returns for his 15th year as head coach of the Dukes. In his 19



STEVE MANHEIM / CHRONICLE

Amherst's Mark Harris.

years as a varsity coach, Sasack has won 151 games. Wellington was 12-14 a year ago and returns seniors Austin Goss (.420 batting), Max Carevic and Matt Norton. Juniors Tristan Arno (.292, 26

RBI), Everett Kropff (.377, 19 RBI), Mason Wright (.325, 15 RBI), Cole McLean, Bailey Mull and Randy Sizer. Carevic and Mull are returning after missing last year with injuries.

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Shaun Bennett



Linda Cudlin

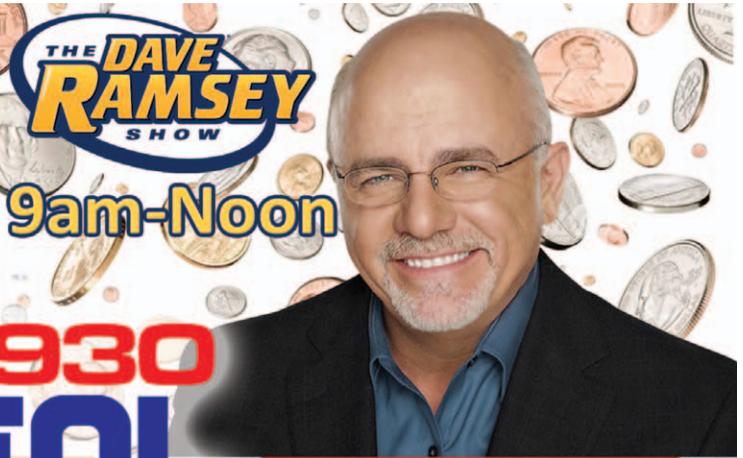
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	1	2	3	4	5 WSH	6 FLO 4:05
7 FLO	8	9	10	11	12 JOL 7:05	13 JOL 6:05
14 JOL 2:05	15	16 WSH 11:05AM	17 WSH 11:05AM	18 WSH 12:35	19 TC	20 TC
21 TC	22	23 GAT MAC	24 GAT MAC	25 GAT MAC	26 NOR MAC	27 NOR MAC
28 NOR MAC	29 WC 3:05	30 WC 6:35	31 WC 6:35			

JUNE

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
				1	2 JOL	3 JOL
4 JOL	5	6 SIL 7:05	7 SIL 7:05	8 SIL 7:05	9 GAT 7:05	10 GAT 6:05
11 GAT 2:05	12	13 EVN	14 EVN	15 EVN	16 SIL	17 SIL
18 SIL	19	20 WSH 7:05	21 WSH 7:05	22 WSH 7:05	23 TC 7:05	24 TC 6:05
25 TC 2:05	26	27 WC	28 WC	29 WC	30 SCH 7:05	

JULY

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
						1 SCH 6:05
2 SCH 2:05	3 EVN 7:05	4 EVN 2:05	5 EVN 7:05	6	7 FLO 7:05	8 FLO 6:05
9 FLO 2:05		ALL STAR BREAK			14 JOL 7:05	15 JOL 6:05
16 JOL 2:05		18 RC	19 RC	20 RC	21 FLO	22 FLO
23 FLO	24	25 RC 11:05	26 RC 7:05	27 RC 7:05	28 NOR 7:05	29 NOR 6:05
30 NOR 2:05	31					

2017

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SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
		1 SCH	2 SCH	3 SCH	4 WSH	5 WSH
6 WSH	7	8 TC	9 TC	10 TC	11 SCH 7:05	12 SCH 6:05
13 SCH 2:05	14	15 WC	16 WC	17 WC	18 WSH	19 WSH
20 WSH	21	22 TC 6:35	23 TC 6:35	24 TC 6:35	25 SCH	26 SCH
27 SCH	28	29 WC 6:35	30 WC 6:35	31 WC 6:35	1 JOL	2 JOL
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Hope on the horizon after a strong finish

By: Andy "Bull" Barch

If it matters more how you finish than how you start, then the Lake Erie Crushers have a lot to look forward to in the 2017 season. The summer of 2016 in Avon was very interesting, and the only constant seemed to be change; but change, as they say, can be a good thing.

Not quite halfway through the 2016 season, the Crushers decided to part ways with former manager Chris Mongiardo after what was a wild roller coaster ride to start the season. Newly appointed manager Cameron Roth was hired at the end of June, and after surviving a few bumps in the road early on, he totally transformed the team by season's end.

The remarkable turnaround was one of the finest in the history of the franchise and the Frontier League. The Crushers were 10 games below .500 (32-42) on August 10, and by the end of the season, they were back at the .500 (48-48) hump. Not only were they back to .500, but they were not eliminated from the playoff race until the final day of play in the regular season. The Crushers went 17-7 from August 11 through the end of the year.

Though they will lose some key contributors from the team that made that incredible run, the Crushers will bring back a good chunk of that core that clearly has a lot to build on. One of those names is **Connor Oliver**, who had a terrific 2016 season. The centerfielder had his contract purchased by the New York Yankees about a month into the



Submitted photos

season, before returning to the Crushers at the beginning of July. He hit .275 on the season while leading the team with 13 homeruns in just 76 games. Oliver had 81 hits on the season, including 29 for extra bases. He also drove in 40 runs and led the team with 18 stolen bases.

In addition to Oliver, the Crushers will return catcher **Bryan De La Rosa**. De La Rosa, a former third round pick by the Atlanta Braves in the 2012 MLB draft, joined the Crushers early in the season, and really turned it on towards the end of the sea-

son. While he was Lake Erie's primary backstop, he showed some versatility throughout the year, making an appearance in the outfield as well. He turned it on offensively towards the end of the season, finishing the year with a .261 batting average with 13 doubles, four homers and 30 RBIs over 73 games.

Lake Erie will also benefit from the return of **Max Casper**, who brings four years of Frontier League experience with him into the 2017 season. Of his previous four seasons, two were spent with the Crushers. He was traded

to Lake Erie twice in his career, spending the 2013 and 2016 seasons with the Men of Crush. Casper is widely regarded as one of the best defensive middle infielders in the entire 12-team circuit. He had 69 hits over 94 games last season, including 14 doubles and drove in 29 runs.

The pitching staff, which endured a lot of change throughout the course of the 2016 season, will bring back some instrumental parts as well. Near the top of that list will be 2016 closer **Chandler Jagodzinski**, who went

See **CRUSHERS**, 13

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CRUSHERS

From 12

3-3 with a team high 14 saves, and posted an ERA of 2.37. Lake Erie acquired him in a trade from the Normal Cornbelters prior to last season. The Crushers closer was a workhorse, appearing in 48 games throughout the season.

Steve Hagen, a product of Brecksville, Ohio, is expected to return as well. Over the first half of the 2016 season, Hagen was lights out, and because of his incredible first half, Hagen earned the honor of starting the 2016 Frontier League All-Star game for the Eastern Division. He finished the season with a 7-6 record with a 3.48 ERA. He led the Crushers with 111 innings pitched.

Another key component in 2016 was right-hander Juan Caballero, who made a dozen starts throughout the year, and totaled 81.1 innings pitched. Caballero posted a 5-1 record

after starting the season on the disabled list and posted a 3.54 ERA along the way. He was used in a variety of roles throughout the year, but ended the season in the rotation. He was the winning pitcher in the 2016 season finale, tossing seven strong innings, allowing just a pair of runs on four hits while fanning five.

Perhaps the biggest change, however, does not involve players, or personnel. After eight seasons of referring to the ballpark as All Pro Freight Stadium, or "The Freight", the 2017 season will mark the first year that the ballpark will be known as **Sprenger Health Stadium**. The Crushers announced the new name at a press conference on January 4. The terms of the naming rights deal were not released, but co-owners Tom and Jacqueline Kramig stated in a release on the team's website "It is an honor to be partnering with Sprenger Health Care Systems on this naming rights agreement. Sprenger



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Max Casper

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While Crusher Manager Cam Roth will begin his first full season at the helm, he will have a couple of new faces with him on the coaching staff. He'll return Emmanuel Quiles, who will serve as the third base coach, and add both Austin Gallagher and Mike Nannini.

Gallagher will serve as the hitting coach. He's a native of Lancaster, Pa., and he's a former third round pick of the Los Angeles Dodgers. The former first baseman spent six years with the Dodgers organization, before joining the Windy City Thunderbolts. He played 78 games in the Frontier League with the Thunderbolts in 2015, hitting .338 with 16 home runs.

Nannini is Lake Erie's new pitching coach. He spent parts of 10 seasons playing at many levels of affiliated ball after being selected in the first round of the 1998 draft by the Houston Astros. The Detroit, Mich., native retired in 2015 and will take over a pitching staff that tied for the Frontier League lead in Team ERA (3.77).

The 2017 season begins at home for the Crushers, as they play host to the Joliet Slammers, the defending Eastern Division Champions, on Friday, May 12 at Sprenger Health Stadium. The first pitch on opening night is scheduled for 7:05 PM, and it begins a six-game homestand to start the season. Ironically, the regular season ends against those very same Joliet Slammers on Labor Day weekend. The regular season will finish in Joliet, Ill., on Sunday, September 3.



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"Where we still do business with a handshake!"

Cleveland Indians 2017 season preview

By: Joel Hammond

It still hurts, of course.

The Cleveland Indians, down two starters for much of the stretch run, a catcher for long periods and one of their best hitters for nearly the entire season, almost pulled off the unthinkable: They ran away from the pack in the American League Central, then steamrolled big-money Boston and Toronto in the American League Division and Championship Series, respectively.

But their bad luck finally caught up to them: The Tribe, up 3-1 in the World Series against yet another big-money team – the Cubs, who won 103 games in the regular season – ran out of gas and lost in the 10th inning of Game 7 of an all-time-great World Series.

So yeah, it hurts.

But pride remains.

“You’re disappointed, because you want to win. But when the game’s over you talk to the players.

When I was by myself, when I could think – we were disappointed, but pride won out,” said Terry Francona, who won the American League Manager of the Year award for guiding the team to the World Series. “Everything we asked our guys to do, they did. We went up against really veteran teams and beat them. The Cubs were a really good team. When Rajai (Davis) hit that homer, lesser teams would have folded. But the Cubs didn’t and they deserve credit for that.”

The temptation, of course, was there to stand pat -- to bring the same team back that nearly won the title without making significant additions. After all, the thinking went that Carlos Carrasco and Danny Salazar and Yan Gomes and maybe, just maybe, Michael Brantley all would be back at full strength for another run.

And yet the Tribe didn’t stand



pat: The club pulled off the coup of the offseason, patiently waiting out the market for the top hitter of the offseason, **Edwin Encarnacion** – then waiting out the market for one of the best lefty relief specialists on the market, Boone Logan.

Add it all up -- \$60 million guaranteed over three years for Encarnacion and another \$5.5 million guaranteed for Logan -- and the Tribe will carry a record payroll and lofty expectations into the 2017 season as they look to finish the job.

“I think there were four or five (additional) teams that had interest in me, but I made the decision to come here because here I have the opportunity to win the World Series,” said Encarnacion, who hit 42 homers and drove in 127 runs last season for the Blue Jays.

“They look great and they have great young talented players. They will have a lot of opportunities to be in the World Series again and win it.”

Encarnacion replaces Mike Napoli, who had a career year; Francona and others within the organization’s first call upon com-

pleting the deal for Encarnacion was to Napoli, whose presence in the clubhouse was crucial and who they were unable to bring back after the deal. And while the signing drew plenty of attention in the offseason -- and ticket sales, as the Indians Season Ticket base is at levels the club hasn’t seen in about seven years – the club’s strength will remain in its core players.

You know the players: **Corey Kluber** finished third in AL Cy Young voting after going 18-9; he went 4-1 in the postseason and likely would have been the World Series MVP had the Tribe held on. He started Games 1, 4 and 7, the latter two on short rest, as the Tribe dealt with injuries to Carlos Carrasco and Danny Salazar.

Francisco Lindor, a first-time All-Star like Kluber, won the AL Gold and Platinum gloves at shortstop and hit .301 with 5.7 WAR – among the top players in the league. His middle infield tag team partner, Jason Kipnis, had a career year with career highs in homers, runs and more.

Carlos Santana hit 34 homers, also a career high, and set career highs in slugging percentage and

OPS; Jose Ramirez, meanwhile, morphed into Michael Brantley. The unheralded one-time utility player not only seized the third base job midway through the season, but also took the league by storm at the plate, becoming one of baseball’s best hitters in the clutch. Overall, he led the team with a .312 average and had 176 hits, while also knocking 46 doubles.

Add to that Encarnacion’s power and ability to put the ball in play while maintaining a relatively low strikeout rate for a power hitter – and, potentially, Brantley, and you have an offense that could be even better than last year’s, which was fifth in baseball in runs. Brantley, who underwent a second surgery in August, at deadline for this publication was participating in simulated games at the team’s complex and building up toward his debut in spring games.

And despite losing Rajai Davis – the AL steals leader who signed with Oakland – the Indians say they’ll maintain their aggressive approach on the basepaths. The

See **INDIANS**, 15



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INDIANS

From 14

Tribe, led by Davis' 43 steals, led the AL with 134 stolen bases.

"We're going to preach the same thing we did last year," Kipnis said. "We want to run often, run early and don't come back with your tail between your legs just because you got thrown out once or twice. We want guys to still be aggressive, and to still kind of push it on the offensive side."

While the Tribe's offense was a surprise last year, the club's pitching staff lived up to its billing as one of the AL – and all of baseball's – best. Carrasco had a 3.32 ERA and struck out 150 in 146 innings before an ill-fated comebacker by Ian Kinsler ended his season on Sept. 17. Salazar, like Lindor and Kluber, was a first-time All-Star who battled elbow soreness that limited his impact late in the season.

In their absence, Josh Tomlin and Trevor Bauer were key contributors down the stretch and in the postseason; Tomlin dominated the Red Sox at Fenway Park, the Jays in Toronto, and the Cubs at Wrigley Field before falling in Game 6. Bauer, meanwhile, set career highs



in innings and wins.

Oh, and there's the small matter of the bullpen, which was the AL's second best and which now will have **Andrew Miller** for a full season and Logan – against whom lefty batters hit .142 last year – added to Cody Allen, Bryan Shaw, Dan Otero and others.

"What we tried to do is find the right guy to complement our bullpen," said Chris Antonetti, the

Indians president of baseball operations. "We weren't just going to sign a guy because he was left-handed. In fact, we wanted to try to identify pitchers who we thought could help us. Boone, we feel, is that guy."

The present, then, is promising. The future has been on display in camp, too: Outfield prospects Bradley Zimmer (No. 1 prospect according to MLB Pipeline), Greg

Allen (No. 9), and Yandy Diaz (No. 10) all have impressed, as has No. 2 prospect, catcher Francisco Mejia. Pitchers Ryan Merritt, Shawn Armstrong and Mike Clevinger all contributed to the big-league club in 2016, while younger pitchers such as Triston McKenzie, Brady Aiken and others are on their way.

"To say that the future is bright," Francona said, "is probably the understatement of the century."



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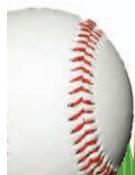
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						1
2	3 ● 7:05 TEX	4 ● 8:05 TEX	5 ● 8:05 TEX	6	7 ● 9:40 ARI	8 ● 8:10 ARI
9 ● 4:10 ARI	10	11 ▲ 4:10 CWS	12 ● 6:10 CWS	13 ● 6:10 CWS	14 ● 7:10 DET	15 ● 4:05 DET
16 ● 1:10 DET	17 ● 8:10 MIN	18 ● 8:10 MIN	19 ● 8:10 MIN	20 ● 1:10 MIN	21 ● 8:10 CWS	22 ● 7:10 CWS
23 2:10 CWS ● 1:10 SEA	24	25 ● 6:10 HOU	26 ● 6:10 HOU	27 ● 6:10 HOU	28 ● 7:10 SEA	29 ● 4:10 SEA

JULY

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SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1 ■ 7:15 DET
2 ● 1:10 DET	3	4 ● 7:10 SD	5 ● 7:10 SD	6 ● 7:10 SD	7 ● 7:10 DET	8 ● 7:15 DET
9 ● 8:05 DET	10	11	12	13	14 ● 10:07 OAK	15 ● 9:07 OAK
16 ● 4:07 OAK	17 ● 10:15 SF	18 ● 10:15 SF	19 ● 3:45 SF	20	21 ● 7:10 TOR	22 ● 7:10 TOR
23 1:10 TOR ● 2:10 CWS	24	25 ● 7:10 LAA	26 ● 7:10 LAA	27 ● 12:10 LAA	28 ● 8:10 CWS	29 ● 7:10 CWS

MAY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1 ● 7:10 DET	2 ● 7:10 DET	3 ● 7:10 DET	4 ● 1:10 DET	5 ● 8:15 KC	6 ● 4:10 KC
7 ● 2:15 KC	8 ● 7:07 TOR	9 ● 7:07 TOR	10 ● 7:07 TOR	11	12 ● 7:10 MIN	13 ● 4:10 MIN
14 ● 1:10 MIN	15 ● 6:10 TB	16 ● 6:10 TB	17 ● 12:10 TB	18	19 ● 8:10 HOU	20 ● 4:10 HOU
21 ● 2:10 HOU	22 ● 7:10 CIN	23 ● 7:10 CIN	24 ● 6:10 CIN	25 ● 6:10 CIN	26 ● 7:10 KC	27 ● 4:10 KC
28 ● 1:10 KC	29 ● 4:10 OAK	30 ● 6:10 OAK	31 ● 6:10 OAK			

AUGUST

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1 ● 7:10 BOS	2 ● 7:10 BOS	3 ● 7:10 NYY	4 ● 7:10 NYY	5 ● 7:10 NYY
6 ● 1:10 NYY	7	8 ● 7:10 COL	9 ● 12:10 COL	10 ● 7:10 TB	11 ● 7:10 TB	12 ● 6:10 TB
13 ● 1:10 TB	14	15 ● 8:10 MIN	16 ● 8:10 MIN	17 ● 1:10 MIN	18 ● 8:15 KC	19 ● 7:15 KC
20 ● 2:15 KC	21 ● 7:10 BOS	22 ● 7:10 BOS	23 ● 7:10 BOS	24 ● 7:10 BOS	25 ● 7:10 KC	26 ● 7:10 KC
27 ● 1:10 KC	28 ● 7:05 NYY	29 ● 7:05 NYY	30 ● 1:05 NYY	31		

JUNE

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 ● 12:10 OAK	2 ● 8:15 KC	3 ● 2:15 KC
4 ● 2:15 KC	5	6 ● 8:40 COL	7 ● 3:10 COL	8	9 ● 7:10 CWS	10 ● 7:15 CWS
11 ● 1:10 CWS	12	13 ● 7:10 LAD	14 ● 7:10 LAD	15 ● 12:10 LAD	16 ● 8:10 MIN	17 ● 2:10 MIN
18 ● 2:10 MIN	19 ● 7:05 BAL	20 ● 7:05 BAL	21 ● 7:05 BAL	22 ● 7:05 BAL	23 ● 7:10 MIN	24 ● 4:10 MIN
25 ● 1:10 MIN	26 ● 7:10 TEX	27 ● 7:10 TEX	28 ● 7:10 TEX	29 ● 12:10 TEX	30 ● 7:10 DET	

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1 ● 7:10 DET	2 ● 6:10 DET
3 ● 1:10 DET	4 ● 2:10 CWS	5 ● 8:10 CWS	6 ● 8:10 CWS	7 ● 8:10 CWS	8 ● 7:10 BAL	9 ● 1:05 BAL
10 ● 1:10 BAL	11 ● 7:10 DET	12 ● 7:10 DET	13 ● 12:10 DET	14 ● 7:10 KC	15 ● 7:10 KC	16 ● 4:10 KC
17 ● 1:10 KC	18	19 ● 10:07 LAA	20 ● 10:07 LAA	21 ● TBA LAA	22 ● 10:10 SEA	23 ● 4:10 SEA
24 ● 4:10 SEA ● 3:10 CWS	25	26 ● 7:10 MIN	27 ● 7:10 MIN	28 ● 12:10 MIN	29 ● 7:10 CWS	30 ● 7:10 CWS

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