

First-year head coach Sean Lyons sports upbeat attitude for SIUE baseball team

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EDWARDSVILLE – It's a fresh start for SIUE baseball this spring, and first-year Head Coach [Sean Lyons](#) sports an upbeat attitude for a golden anniversary season.

He's enthused to be guiding the Cougars, who open the 2017 season Friday in Seattle, Washington.

SIUE faces the Seattle Redhawks four times in three days, including a doubleheader Saturday. Then it's on to Emerson, Georgia, for four neutral-site games with Ohio University before the Cougars debut at home Friday, March 3, against Northern Illinois.

"First and foremost, I love it here," said the 40-year-old Lyons, a former assistant at Bradley and Eastern Illinois. "There are outstanding people at SIUE, and that has made the transition great."

He added, "There's lots of good high school baseball locally and in the Midwest, so that makes SIUE a showplace for recruiting."

Lyons, just the fourth head coach in the Cougars' 50-year history, dating to 1968 has rolled up his sleeves and gone to work. SIUE finished 9-40 last season and 6-24 in the [Ohio Valley Conference](#), so improvement is the name of the game for Lyons and assistant coaches Brandon Scott, Tyler Hancock and Joe Kelch.

"The biggest thing for me is to make sure the team is prepared and that we play sound fundamental defense," Lyons said. "I love hitting and coaching it because I'm an offensive-minded guy, but I know that it's pitching and defense that wins. Our plan to build our brand is to improve our pitching and defense."

One of SIUE's key returnees is senior designated hitter [Keaton Wright](#) (Troy, Illinois). The left-handed swinging Wright batted .362 with 67 hits, including 16 doubles, five home runs and 37 RBIs last season. He was the lone Cougar selected to the preseason All-OVC squad.

"Keaton is a big-time force on offense," Lyons said.

Wright, who underwent off-season surgery on his right elbow, also could log some time at first base.

SIUE was picked 10th with 39 points in the 11-team OVC preseason rankings.

"The short-term goal is to see the team get better every week," Lyons said. "I want us to be better in April than we are in February. If we can do that, the wins and losses will take care of themselves."

Consistent pitching could go a long way toward determining SIUE's success, Lyons said. "Pitching and defense are the main focus," he said.

Newcomer [Nelson Martz](#) (Alton, Illinois), a transfer from Lewis and Clark Community College, could lead the staff, Lyons said. Martz' dad, Randy, is the head baseball coach at LCCC.

"Nelson has the potential to be the ace," Lyons said of the 6-foot, 3-inch right-hander, a Roxana High graduate. "He has really good stuff."

[Brock Fulkerson](#) (Mount Vernon, Illinois), a 6-7 junior right-hander, [Danny Ehram](#) (Joliet, Illinois), a 6-0 sophomore right-hander and holdover [Brendan Miller](#) (Plainfield, Illinois), a 6-4 junior righty, also should take turns in the Cougars' rotation. Miller fashioned a 3-2 record with one save in 20 games, covering 51.2 innings, last season. He brings back the most pitching experience from the 2016 squad.

Lyons has junior [Mason McReaken](#) (Centralia, Illinois) to anchor the bullpen. Fellow juniors [Tyler Hutchinson](#) (Sorento, Illinois) and [Tristan Walters](#) (Canton, Illinois) and redshirt junior [Mike Miller](#) (Tinley Park, Illinois) also are key pieces to the bullpen, Lyons said.

"The back end of the bullpen, including the closer, could be by committee," Lyons stressed.

Redshirt freshman [Ryan Fritz](#) (Fenton, Mo.), redshirt freshman lefty [David Llorens](#) (Grayslake, Illinois), freshman [A.J. Johnson](#) (Overland Park, Kansas), senior southpaw [Anthony Sitko](#) (Staunton, Illinois), freshman righty [Devin Colley](#) (Godfrey, Illinois), lefty sophomore [Michael Shereyk](#) (Homewood, Illinois) and redshirt freshman lefty [Brian Coulter](#) (St. Louis, Mo.) also fit in SIUE's pitching plans.

Sophomore [Brock Weimer](#) (Edwardsville, Illinois) figures to start at catcher, with senior [Kailer Smith](#) (Port Orchard, Washington) and sophomore [Chris Monasmith](#) (Pacific, Mo.) backing him.

"Brock (Weimer) is a strong kid with a good arm and a lot of power potential," Lyons said.

If Wright is serving as the DH, Lyons can go with junior [Jared McCunn](#) (Eureka, Illinois) at first base. Freshman switch-hitter [Jordan Humphries](#) (Thornton, Colorado) also can fit in there.

[Alec Skender](#) (Metamora, Illinois) will man second base and possibly be the Cougars' leadoff hitter. "He had a tremendous fall season," Lyons said of the senior.

It's redshirt senior [Jordan Stading](#) (Houston, Texas) cast at third base, though he may split some time at shortstop with junior [Mario Tursi](#) (Glenview, Illinois). Stading, a left-handed hitter, transferred from the University of Houston.

Lyons plans to start junior [Dustin Woodcock](#) (Jacksonville, Illinois) in right field, redshirt freshman [Eric Giltz](#) (Warrenville, Illinois) in center and either sophomore [Jackson Layton](#) (Olathe, Kansas) or freshman [Sam Knell](#) (Brentwood, Tenn.) in left field. Woodcock and Knell are left-handed hitters.

Woodcock hit. 286 with four home runs and 20 RBIs last season. "He's a talented outfielder and an offensive run producer," Lyons said.

Redshirt freshman infielder [Garrett Carmichael](#) (Wheelersburg, Ohio), junior outfielder [Marty Brunk](#) (Belleville, Illinois), freshman lefty-hitting infielder [Aaron Goecks](#) (Lannon, Wisconsin), sophomore catcher [Brock Irwin](#) (Alma, Illinois), sophomore infielder [Aaron Jackson](#) (Edwardsville, Illinois) and freshman outfielder [Jackson Hoang](#) (Pewaukee, Wisconsin) can supply depth, Lyons said.

"I'm ready to start the season and most excited about getting to know what we truly have on this team," Lyons said. "It's going to take some time to find the right mix."