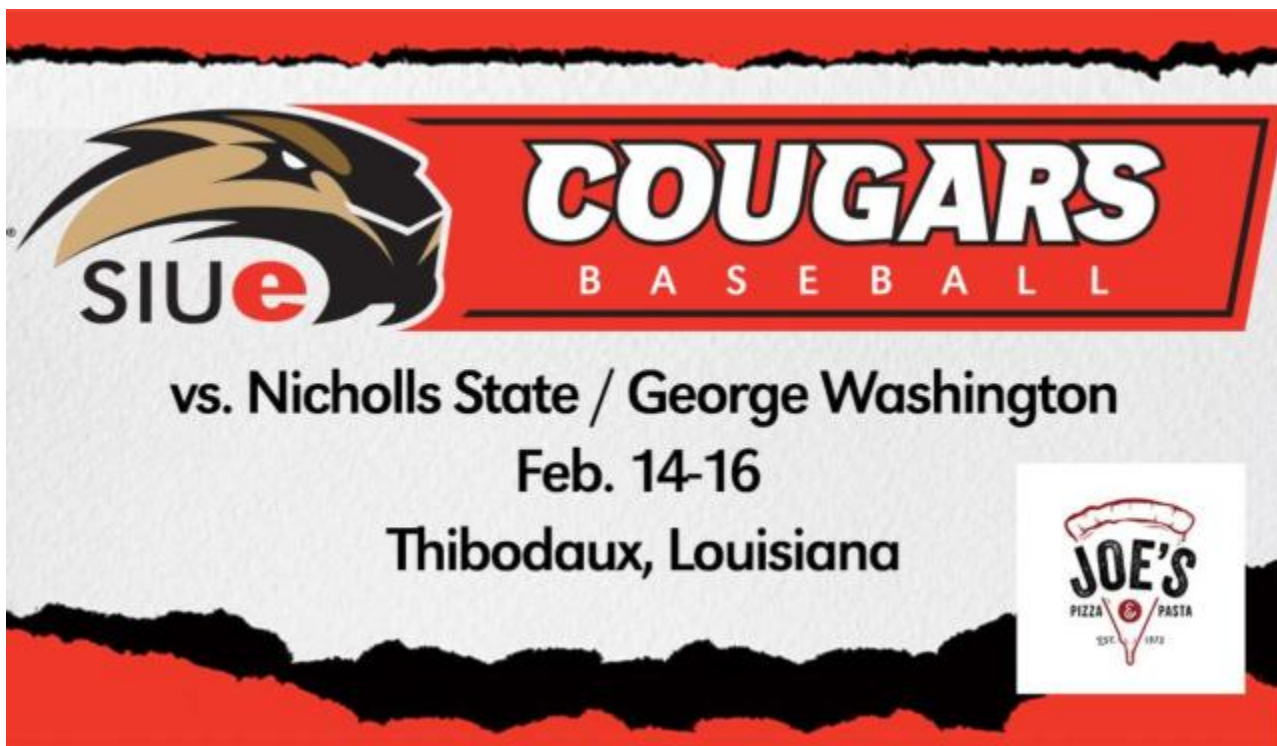


SIUE Head Baseball Coach Sees Bright Times on Horizon for Squad

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SIUE Probable Pitchers:

Friday – February 14th

2pm vs. Nicholls State – Collin Baumgartner

Saturday – February 15th

2pm vs. George Washington – Kenny Serwa

6pm vs. Nicholls State – David Llorens

Sunday – February 16th

10:30am vs. George Washington – Preston Salazar

EDWARDSVILLE – SIUE Head Coach Sean Lyons sees bright times on the horizon for the SIUE baseball team. Boasting a good blend of key returning players and promising additions, the Cougars intend to reinforce his sunny outlook.

SIUE opens its 2020 schedule Friday when the Cougars debut at Nicholls State. They are slated to clash with George Washington and host Nicholls State two times apiece this weekend.

"This group of guys has put in the work and bought into what we are doing," said Lyons, the fourth-year coach. "They feel like they have something to prove to people."

The proof will come in the playing. The Cougars start with an 11-game trip in Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas before they return home on March 3 to welcome rival Saint Louis.

"We play a quality schedule and those first (11 road dates) are an opportunity to chase some good weather and play different teams," Lyons said. "It's a good test when you play teams with different styles."

SIUE is scheduled to begin Ohio Valley Conference competition on March 6 when the Cougars welcome Tennessee Tech for a three-game series on Roy E. Lee Field at Simmons Baseball Complex.

"Jacksonville State won the league last year and looks like to team to beat this season," Lyons said of the OVC favorite. Eastern Kentucky is picked second and Austin Peay third in the 11-team league.

"Our goal is to keep improving," Lyons said of making progress. "The No. 1 goal is to get to the top of the league, but first it's to get to the middle of the pack."

The Cougars finished 19-32 overall and 11-19 in the OVC, so there's room to grow. They went 15-37 in 2018 and 23-29 in 2017.

"There are a lot of unknowns with our team, but I have a lot of confidence in this group," Lyons said. "Overall, we have 15 newcomers and not all of them are freshmen. We have some transfers and some guys returning from injuries, so we definitely have some impact guys and some depth, primarily with our pitching staff."

Pitching may emerge as the Cougars' secret weapon. They boast preseason All-OVC selection Kenny Serwa, a redshirt junior and 6-foot, 6-inch junior Collin Baumgartner

from nearby Brighton, Illinois, as their main weapons. Both are right-handers. Serwa posted a 3-2 record and had a 3.19 earned run average last season, while Baumgartner logged 82 strikeouts to lead the team.

"Those two experienced guys should anchor our staff," Lyons said. "They are as good of a 1-2 pitching punch as we have had since I have been here. Both of them have received a lot of potential draft looks."

Prized freshman Preston Salazar from, St. Louis, could emerge as the No. 3 starter. Redshirt sophomore lefty David Llorens and junior righty Brian Chandler also are expected to get ample starts.

"We need to be a little more consistent with our starting pitching this season," Lyons said. "I think our biggest improvement piece is our depth in the bullpen."

Seniors Braydon Bone and Cole Milam, from nearby Waterloo, Illinois, figure to bolster the bullpen. Bone had five saves, tops on the team, last season. "It's nice to have two guys that we can count on at the back end of our games," Lyons noted.

Sophomore Quinn Waterhouse, junior Ryan Swanson, junior Ryan Brink, senior Rob Parks, junior Kaid Karnes, junior Brant Glidewell and redshirt freshman Blake Struble give the Cougars' pitching depth. Waterhouse, Parks, Karnes and Struble are left-handers.

Offensively, the Cougars said farewell to power-hitting Brock Weimer, who hammered a SIUE-record 35 career home runs, and Dustin Woodcock, now playing for the Gateway Grizzlies in the Frontier League. Woodcock hit .281 with six home runs and 30 RBIs last season. Weimer batted a team-best .298 with 12 homers and 48 RBIs.

"You can't replace guys like that in the middle of the order," Lyons said.

Nevertheless, the Cougars do have some potential power bats back. First baseman Justin Perkins (.252 with 7 home runs and 34 RBIs), along with outfielder-designated hitter Aaron Goecks (.280) and third baseman Raul Elguezabal (.265 average with 4 HRs and 34 RBIs) are among the chief returnees.

Lyons also plans to open the season with junior Steven Pattan from nearby Godfrey, Illinois, as the catcher, JUCO transfer Connor Kiffer at second base and freshman Josh Ohl from hometown Edwardsville, at shortstop. They will join Perkins, the projected cleanup hitter and Elguezabal, likely the No. 5 hitter, in rounding out the infield starters.

John Stalcup is cast as backup catcher, with Victor Perez also in the mix. Brett Pierson, Richie Well, Tyler Bastunas and Salazar expect to log some innings in the infield. Bastunas also can pitch and play the outfield. The versatile Pierson also can play in the outfield.

Dylan Burris, a junior from Edwardsville, Illinois, looks like the starter in left field and may serve as SIUE's leadoff hitter. "He can be a spark plug at the top of the order," Lyons said.

Brady Bunten has an opportunity to become the starting centerfielder with Goecks, Pierson, Bastunas and Parker Wielt vying for time in right field. "Brady has all of the tools to be a very accomplished player," Lyons said of the redshirt freshman.

Lyons is ready to start the season and so are the Cougars.

"We lost quite a few players from last year, but we have added some experience, especially on the mound," he said.

SIUE's nonconference schedule is an ambitious one with home-and-home games against Western Illinois and SLU, single dates with Missouri State, Evansville, Missouri, Bradley and Illinois State. There's also an intriguing three-game series at SIUC in mid-April.

The OVC schedule features 30 games prior to the conference tournament May 19-24 at Rent One Park in Marion, Illinois.