



Three L&C Baseball Players a Making Splash on New Alton River Dragons Prospect League Team

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GODFREY – Three baseball players who've taken the field for Lewis and Clark Community College are now finding success and attention playing for the newly-formed Alton River Dragons summer collegiate squad.

Pitchers Brandon Hampton and Adam Stilts, along with outfielder Blake Burris, have all carved out prominent roles on the Prospect League team, designed to showcase college players from throughout the United States to local fans and Major League Baseball scouts.

L&C Interim Head Coach Alex Ferguson, previously an assistant coach under Randy Martz until his retirement this year, said Hampton, Stilts and Burris have all established themselves as great student athletes, and he's excited to see what they can do in the prestigious Prospect League. He added that the establishment of the River Dragons brings a great opportunity for his Trailblazers.

"It was our goal to start building a relationship with the River Dragons," Ferguson said. "General Manager Dallas Martz and Manager Darrell Handelsman have been great to work with. It will be a great learning experience for all three players. Adam Stilts and

Blake Burris both had strong springs for us and we are thrilled with this opportunity for them to showcase their abilities."

Stilts, an Alton High School graduate entering his sophomore year at L&C, said it was an honor to play for the River Dragons.

"It's really exciting to be here," he said. "Not only do I get to play with a great group of guys, but these are some of the best players from colleges and universities all around the country. They're just fun to play with."

The hard-throwing right-handed starter was the most prolific pitcher on the L&C staff this year as a freshman, leading the team in strikeouts (67) and innings pitched (64). He walked only 14 batters and held an ERA of 4.50. He has committed to return to the Trailblazers next year.

Stilts was attracted to L&C by the recruitment efforts of Martz and Ferguson.

"I knew Martz was a great pitching coach, and Ferguson is going to continue being great there," he said. "I feel like they've really built a up a good program, and I'm excited to be back this fall. I think the best is yet to come. I love being around my teammates every moment I can. That's time you don't get back"

Stilts is studying business with a focus on sports management, although his focus remains on a career in baseball. He does, however, recommend L&C for its academics, alongside athletics.

"It's a great school," he said. "It's probably the nicest community college you'll find. It feels like a university. The school side of it is very solid."

Burris, a graduate of Edwardsville High School, has been at L&C for the last two years. With the Trailblazers, he's transformed himself into a legitimate baseball prospect. In 2021 Burris led the team in hits (44), runs (36), RBIs (26) and co-led in home runs with seven.

He didn't waste time making himself known with the River Dragons, either, hitting the franchise's first ever home run in the team's first home game at Lloyd Hopkins Field in Alton.

Burris chose L&C to play for coaches Martz, Ferguson and David Hopkins. He credits the L&C coaching staff for his improvement and success.

"It was all in the way we practiced," Burris said. "My approach just got a lot better while I was at Lewis and Clark. Coach Martz and the staff worked with me a lot with swinging at better pitches and taking better at-bats, and the numbers really show that."

His favorite moments in his time at L&C include the team's three walk-off wins this year.

"At Lewis and Clark, I got play with a lot of guys I grew up playing with and against," Burris said. "It's been a blast. Everyone here I really liked. My professors have all been really good to me and helpful. Of course, all my teammates and coaches are just really good people. I've enjoyed the atmosphere, what it's brought me, and how I've grown as a person

Burris has yet to announce where he'll be going to school and playing next year. He said he'll likely go into business, but only "if the whole baseball thing doesn't work out."

Hampton is the most experienced of the three Trailblazers, and is the oldest player on the River Dragons. Following his two years at L&C studying business, he graduated from McKendree University with a bachelor's degree in business administration.

In 2018 and 2019, Hampton amassed a team-leading 112.2 innings pitched for the Trailblazers. The Civic Memorial High School alumni has been a valuable asset for the River Dragons as a southpaw pitching in long relief. He's struck out 11 in his first 10.1 innings on the mound, with a 3.48 ERA.

Like Burris and Stilts, Hampton chose L&C for the coaching staff and the reputation of the college.

"I loved everything about L&C," he said. "Coach Martz, Ferguson and Hopkins really taught me about demeanor and how it helps you find success both on and off the field. I also loved all my teachers there. My time at L&C was excellent."

Hampton's sophomore year on the baseball field was especially excellent. The 2019 team broke a school record with 30 wins on a 47-game schedule.

"I feel like that was a real turning point for the Lewis and Clark baseball program, like we got put on the map," he said. "It's always been a great program as far as recruiting, but that year made people start paying attention to Trailblazers baseball. Coach Martz made it a great program. Ferguson and Hopkins definitely will continue to build on it. They do a really good job."

Hampton plans to return to McKendree University next year to begin pursuing his Master's degree and continue his baseball career there. He has one year of eligibility left as compensation for the lost 2020 season amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information the Lewis and Clark Community College baseball team, contact Ferguson at roferguson@lc.edu.

For all information on the Alton River Dragons, visit <http://www.altonbaseball.com>.

