

Versatility, Mix Of Veteran, Younger Players Will Be Key To Successful Edwardsville Baseball Season

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EDWARDSVILLE - The powerful Edwardsville High baseball team is off to a roaring 4-0 start against some of the state's best competition and expectations are strong for a top-notch season in 2022.

The Tigers come off a successful 34-4 campaign a year ago that included a remarkable 28-game winning streak before losing in the IHSA Class 4A regional final to O'Fallon.

"Oh, we're doing well," said Edwardsville head coach Tim Funkhouser. "We're getting some good weather, the guys are working hard so far and trying to just get better every day."

During the practice and first games, Funkhouser was able to make many teaching points about various situations that his players responded very well too. It's a part of the learning curve as preseason moves right along.

"Yeah, I think they all want to try to get better," Funkhouser said. "And baseball's one of those things that you can work on it a lot, but when you actually get out there to make game adjustments or game-speed adjustments, you're going to mess up and you've got to get your mind framed up as well as your body. So we're kind of going through that phase right now and looking forward to opening and competing next week."

Funkhouser isn't the kind of coach that likes to make predictions early on, but rather let things play out and see how everything goes as the early season rolls along.

"Well, that stuff will play itself out," Funkhouser said. "I'm not a big predictor at the very beginning of the year. I think we have a lot of guys that can do different things and I think as we learn how to compete in games and take it to fruition, I think it'll give us a chance against anybody."

Among the core of returning players for the Tigers will be catcher Grant Huebner, who played very well, hitting .366 with two homers and 33 RBIs, whom Funkhouser said excelled in all aspects of the game.

"He did well for us in all aspects last year as well," Funkhouser said, "offensively, base running and played the game really hard. So he was a stalwart for us."

Spencer Stearns returns from a first-team all-Southwestern Conference season, hitting .384 with five homers and 43 RBIs at third base and on the mound, along with Gannon Burns on the infield and Cade Hardy, Adam Powell, who did well until an injury sidelined him late and Caleb Copeland, who fought off various injuries to play well for the Tigers.

Jake Holder and Alec Marchetto also return, along with younger players such as Cole Funkhouser, Kayden Jennings, Caden Archer, Logan Geggus, Jacoby Roberson, Zach

Schmitt, Bryce Beagle, Andrew Hendrickson, Joe Kampwerth and Lucas Huebner, among others playing for roster spots. All are expected to make positive contributions as the season goes along.

"We'll kind of see how the rest plays out," Funkhouser said. "We've got a whole listing of guys that we're kind of going through and days like today, we're trying to figure out who's able to produce and who needs a little more seasoning."

The schedule is loaded again with very good teams - and that's just the Southwestern Conference schedule.

"This is one of our more challenging schedules," Funkhouser said. "I think guys like being in the fire and seeing what they're made of and I think there might be times in the season where we felt like maybe we overshot our skis a little bit as far as the schedule," he said with a laugh. "But if we have the right perspective and we work hard in between, our approach and the way we get out there and compete will be the main factors and not always the end result from it. But a lot of times, what happens is if you do those other things well, you give yourself a great chance and even against teams that are going to execute really well, you still have a good chance of winning."

The fact that this will be the first full regular season since 2019, with the 2020 season outright canceled and the 2021 season abbreviated, both because of the COVID-19 pandemic, is very important to the Tigers and Funkhouser and his team is very grateful for the opportunities ahead.

"Guys are excited to have a full season again," Funkhouser said. "It's been a long while since we had that and I think during the high school season, you get to play 35 games now in 11 weeks, I think it is, versus seven-and-a-half, so we have a lot more time to make adjustments and enjoy the time that we get, whether it's on the practice field, off the field, or even in the competition."

As usual, it's a hard-working group that respects and loves the game of baseball and takes pride in doing things the right way.

"Yeah, I think we have a fun, competitive environment," Funkhouser said. "We have high expectations and standards for our guys and our guys are doing a great job of meeting those challenges each day and will continue to push them forward. I think when you have that atmosphere and you're happy for others that are doing well, or you're also pointing out things they could even work on, I think that makes a great environment where you learn from your failure and you get out there and you have more success over time."

The Tigers are definitely ready to get out there, compete and have fun playing ball.

"Yes, yes, absolutely," Funkhouser said. "The goal is if you do a lot of those things and execute well, it seems like the game's more enjoyable. When you don't, it can be a little frustrating. But if you take it in the right perspective and focus on what you can focus on, it sounds very cliché, but those are the kind of things that have worked over time."