

Five Players From 2022 IHSA Class 4A State Champion Edwardsville Baseball Team Sign Letters Of Intent To Play In College

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EDWARDSVILLE - Five members of the Edwardsville High School 2022 IHSA Class 4A state championship baseball team signed letters of intent to attend various colleges in a ceremony held Wednesday night at the high school's Media Center.

Riley Iffrig, an infielder, signed to play at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Ind., infielder Cole Funkhouser cast his lot to play at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, Mo., Caeleb Copeland will be playing for St. Charles, Mo., Community College, Andrew Hendrickson signed with Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield and Kayden Jennings will be playing his college baseball at the University of Illinois-Springfield.

Here's a look at each of the players and their colleges:

RILEY IFFRIG

Iffrig had many reasons why he decided to play his college baseball for the Sycamores.

"It's close to home, I wanted to make sure my parents could still come to see me," Iffrig said in his interview prior to the ceremony, "because basically, all my games all throughout, growing up, it's in a good conference, the Missouri Valley Conference is always one of the top conferences in D-I baseball. So I'm looking forward to it."

Iffrig also felt the coaching staff at ISU, led by head coach Mitch Hannahs, made him feel wanted as well.

"The coaching staff," Iffrig said. "I felt wanted. That was the main thing I was looking for. I wanted to stay close to home and the coaching staff was right. It felt like a good fit."

Iffrig also considered Missouri, SIU-Edwardsville and Wichita State before settling on Indiana State and will start out majoring in business, with the possibility of going into accounting in the future.

Iffrig has some specific plans after graduating from college.

"Get better at baseball," Iffrig said. "Get on campus, get with my future teammates, get to work," he said with a smile. "It starts all over again."

Iffrig is also looking ahead to his final high school season, where the Tigers will be defending the championship that was won on June 11 in a 4-3 thriller over Mundelein in Joliet.

"Yeah, I'm excited," Iffrig said. "We've got a good young group coming back. I think we can do good things, we've just got to get after it every day in practice."

His favorite memory of last season? That was an easy one for Iffrig.

"Oh, probably that final game. lifting that final trophy," Iffrig said. "It was probably the most real feeling. It was fun."

COLE FUNKHOUSER

Cole Funkhouser, a son of Tigers' head coach Tim Funkhouser and a middle infielder for Edwardsville, signed with Central Missouri and is looking forward to playing for the Mules starting in 2024.

"I took a visit down there, saw a practice and saw how they ran everything," Funkhouser said in a post-ceremony interview, "kind of just fit with everything, like who a player I am. It looked like I belonged there, so it felt like."

CMU is one of the better Division-II schools for baseball, playing in a good conference in the Mid-American Intercollegiate Athletic Association for head coach Kyle Crookes.

"Yep," Funkhouser said. "I think they ended up being ranked number one for most of the season last year. And they have a good record, which is another reason why I went there."

Another factor was the donation made by St. Louis native Jim Crane, a graduate of UCM and currently the owner of the world-champion Houston Astros.

"(Crane) ended up donating a lot of good facilities, so those are really nice," Funkhouser said. "That's another reason why."

Funkhouser isn't sure what his major will be at Central Missouri, but is leaning towards business and considered St. Charles Community College as well as another junior college before deciding on UCM.

Funkhouser is indeed looking forward to playing his senior year for the Tigers and helping to defend the state championship.

"Oh, yeah, for sure," Funkhouser said. "It should be really exciting."

Asked for his favorite memory of the season, Funkhouser cited the positive atmosphere in the clubhouse, as well as the bus ride on the way home after the championship win.

"Well, I would have to say the locker room's always good," Funkhouser said, "just like the bus ride after the state championship was also really good."

Funkhouser also feels very confident that the Tigers will have another good season in 2023.

"Oh, yeah, we should be good this year," Funkhouser said. "We should be young, we should be good. We learned a lot from the seniors last year. We should be good this year, too."

ANDREW HENDRICKSON

Andrew Hendrickson, who is a pitcher and infielder for the Tigers, signed to play with Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield and is also looking forward to the opportunity,

"I feel pretty good," Hendrickson said in his post-ceremony interview. "I was looking at a lot of junior colleges and I really figured that Lincoln Land was going to be the best fit for me. I liked all the coaching staff, I liked the campus, the field and I think the team's going to be a good fit for me."

Many former Tigers players have played at Lincoln Land in the past and Hendrickson, who's the son of Saint Louis University head coach Darin Hendrickson, is looking forward to following in their footsteps.

"Yeah, it's definitely," Hendrickson said. "They told me that I'll try to be just like them. I liked it there a lot, so I hope it's going to be good when I get there."

Hendrickson is undecided on a major, but is leaning towards kinesiology or being in construction. After graduating from Lincoln Land, he's not sure what will happen after that.

"Right now, it's still kind of up in the air," Hendrickson said. "We'll see how the first year goes and after that, I plan to attend a four-year if I can."

Hendrickson is "definitely pumped" to have the chance to play for the Loggers and also is looking ahead to the 2023 Tigers season and feels that Edwardsville has a chance to do well.

"Yeah, I definitely think we have a great squad," Hendrickson said. "We can do it again and I think if we all combine as a great team, we can do it."

Winning the championship will go down as Hendrickson's favorite memory of last season.

"I mean, it was probably going to be the winning the state title," Hendrickson said. "It was something that I have never even thought about in my whole life, so it was definitely awesome to do that."

CAELEB COPELAND

Outfielder Caeleb Copeland signed to play for St. Charles Community College in Cottleville, Mo, just outside of St. Charles, and like his teammates, looks forward to the opportunity to play.

"I'm feeling great, just knowing I have a really good program I can go into, with a really good history," Copeland said in his post-ceremony interview, "and just going up from here. I know a lot of good guys, former teammates that are playing there now. I trust what they say and they've said nothing but good things, so I'm excited to get out there and help the program win."

In its nearly 40-year history of the school, SCCC has already established a great reputation for baseball and Copeland is looking ahead to add to the Cougars' legacy.

"They have a lot of prestige in that area," Copeland said, "and it's a high expectation when you get there. But that can only make me a better player, so I'm excited in just getting into that environment and just blossoming as a player."

Copeland also considered various Division-I and -II schools, but felt that St. Charles was the best fit for him in his development as a player and help him move on to a better school. He hopes to play in D-I, with his visit to the school cementing his decision. He plans on majoring in business, which he feels gives him the most opportunities for his future plans, which include being an entrepreneur and starting his own business in the future.

"It doesn't confine me in one area, a job I have to go into," Copeland said. "So I think business is definitely where I want to be at."

Copeland hopes to start a business with his older brother Joe, himself a former Tiger standout who's attending Lindenwood University in St. Charles, going into his senior year himself.

"I also want to be a pastor at some point," Copeland said, "and start a business. I don't know what the business will be yet, but definitely starting a business. This is my main goal."

Copeland's favorite memory is making a big catch in the super-sectional win over Plainfield North that saved the Tigers' postseason lives.

"But unfortunately, I got injured in the semifinal," Copeland said. "I pulled my hamstring, but it was nerve-racking on the bench, more than it was to be actually on the field," he said with a laugh, "because I was a little helpless. But I couldn't do

anything about it. But I had trust in our guys the whole time and we got the win and we have a state championship and the memories I can live on forever."

KAYDEN JENNINGS

Infielder Kayden Jennings signed to play at Illinois-Springfield and is also looking ahead to playing for the Prairie Stars.

"So in recent years, they've been having a winning tradition," Jennings said in his interview, "and I kind of want to be a part of that tradition. And also, we've got a great group of guys coming in, academics are exactly what I want them to be, good campus, good environment. I like it."

Like his Tiger teammates, Jennings is planning on majoring in business with plans on going into either sports management or somewhere in the business field. He also considered a pair of junior colleges as well as a number of both Division-I and Division-II schools, but settled on UIS.

Jennings is looking ahead to the upcoming high school season this spring and while he's happy to have been a vital part of the championship season, he also realizes that it's also a new season and focuses on what's ahead.

"Yes, for sure," Jennings said, "but also got to put that state championship in the rearview and focus on next season and kind of act like it's another season. Don't get too high, don't get too low."

Jennings' favorite memory of the championship came with the final out of the title game over Mundelein.

"Probably when Cole flipped me the ball at second base to get the last out and get the state championship," Jennings said. "And then, probably all the dinners we had with the team, the bus ride, the locker room music, the jam outs."

Tigers' coach Tim Funkhouser is very proud of his players for their signing and feels that they will all do great things on the field for their new schools.

"Oh, I'm just so happy for the kids," Funkhouser said. "They work extremely hard and it's fun when they get to this day. And it's fun for me that we still have them for another year when they get this day. But I think it's good for them to see a direction that they're going to go after that, so they deserve it."

Funkhouser feels that Iffrig will bring much to the table for the Tigers this coming season.

"Riley Iffrig's been great for us the last two years," Funkhouser said, "and he'll continue doing that this year. He'll bring a great glove around first base and some pop from the left side and a guy that's just going to continue developing his swing and has a habit of meeting the challenge when he's faced good pitching. So that'll be great from him."

Jennings will also be a big contributor to the Tigers in the upcoming season as well.

"Kayden Jennings played shortstop for us last year," Funkhouser said, "and also on the infield and does a great job. Very versatile, can play at the next level, can play second, short, third, has flashed out in the outfield some. But with his versatility, his speed and his instincts, he'll be a guy that's always going to find a way to get out in the field. But I think he can be a guy that locks down on a shortstop position. And then, he's shown some power this summer, started hitting some balls out of the ballpark and hitting extra-base hits. So I think that's going to be fun to watch develop during our season and also for UIS."

Cole Funkhouser is almost like a defensive specialist who played mostly at second base last season for the Tigers.

"Cole Funkhouser played great defensive infield for us last year, primarily at second base," Tim Funkhouser said. "Same thing, he's versatile, he can play second, short and third and did a great job towards the top of the lineup at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year, was the kind of guy who produced for us in the postseason with some big hits."

Copeland and Iffrig made a lethal combination in the middle of the lineup for the Tigers and Copeland will be counted on to provide big hits for Edwardsville this coming season as well.

"Caeleb Copeland was another guy, with Riley, in the middle of the order for us and just a constant presence," Funkhouser said, "and I think he'll be another guy this his power will even come out more than it did last year. But he's another guy who was hitting over .400, I believe, and played a really good outfield and was a returning guy from the previous year. And just continued to do great things. So we look forward to seeing him to continue to develop."

Hendrickson's combination of being a corner infielder and a pitcher makes him a valuable player that adds to the Tigers as well.

"Andrew Hendrickson is kind of a two-way guy right now for us," Funkhouser said. "playing a corner infield position, has a bat with some pop from the left side and has also gotten a kit stronger. And also pitches for us, too, so then at the next level, right now, I think he's going to focus in on being a position guy or targeted that way, but you never know. It could go both directions there."

All five players are very talented with a strong work ethic and Funkhouser thinks they've all found schools that are the right fits for them.

"Oh, yeah," Funkhouser said, "and those attributes, I think our guys have gone on to the next level. These guys are right there with them at all places, I think, are all great fits for them to go there. And they need to go there and compete. I think they've been equipped with that along the way and they'll continue to get better as players and get an education that'll be fun."

Each player also brings back much experience from the championship season as well, which bodes well for Edwardsville.

"Yeah," Funkhouser said. "And it's one of those things where we had eight seniors graduate, so there are guys step up leadership-wise, guys step up playing time, guys step up competing. So a lot of those things play out with our whole team and it'll be fun when we get out there in the springtime. But right now, it's good to see on this day to celebrate the successes that they have had and the journey they've had to get to this point. And now, to take advantage of their last year of high school and then, prepare themselves for college."