

Cougars Welcome Redbirds in Home Opener

by Joe Pott

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**Illinois State (2-1) at
SIUE (2-1)**

February 21

**Roy E. Lee Field / Simmons Baseball Complex
Edwardsville, Illinois**

LAST YEAR: With 27 wins in 2022, SIUE had its most wins under [Sean Lyons](#) and the second most wins since moving to Division I with the 2009 season. The most wins at

Division I is 28 by the 2011 team, which was the year before SIUE played a conference schedule. The Cougars finished fifth in the Ohio Valley Conference. SIUE returned to the OVC Tournament for the first time since 2015. For the first time ever, SIUE won at the tournament, finishing 2-2.

HOME COOKING: The 2022 team finished 17-9 at home. The 17 wins were the fourth most in the OVC last year and the most home wins for the Cougars since the 2011 team won 19 home games.

PLAYER OF THE WEEK: Senior starter [Jake Bockenstedt](#) earned OVC Pitcher of the Week honors following opening weekend. He worked six shutout innings to lead SIUE to an opening day win at Incarnate Word.

CENTURY MARK: The April 3 win over UT Martin last season was Head Coach [Sean Lyons](#)' 100th for his career. He has a career record of 115-160 all at SIUE.

PRESEASON ALL-OVC: Designated hitter [Brady Bunten](#), outfielder [Brennan Orf](#) and third basemen [Josh Ohl](#) each were named to the All-Ohio Valley Conference preseason team.

HOW OFFENSIVE: SIUE hitters led the OVC with a batting average of .303, ten points higher than any other SIUE season at Division I. The Cougars slugged .524, which led the league, and reached base at a .384 clip. Both totals were records at the Division I level. SIUE scored 430 runs, bettering the next closest season by 85 runs, despite playing just three more games.

ROUNDTRIPPER RECORD: SIUE's 99 home runs last year set a school record. The 1998 team held the previous record with 69. The Cougars were second in the OVC and No. 21 in the NCAA. at 1.8 home runs per game, the Cougars were No. 15 in the country.

EXPERIENCE MATTERS: In addition to SIUE's All-OVC picks, the Cougars return [Avery Owusu-Asiedu](#), [Ole Arntson](#), [Brett Pierson](#), [Drew Mize](#) and [Braedyn Brewer](#), all of which played in at least 30 games in 2023.

CLOSING IN ON CAREER MARK: Bunten is closing in on SIUE's career home run mark. With a home run in the season-opening series, Bunten now has 31 home runs (fourth). SIUE's career record for home runs is 35, held by Brock Weimer (2016-19).

NEW NO. 1: Bockenstedt begins the year as the Cougars' top starter. While he primarily closed games last year, he has made nine career starts. In 37 career appearances covering 87.1 innings, Bockenstedt has 96 career strikeouts and a career record of 8-10.

NEW STAFF: The Cougars will rely on an entirely new starting rotation, and a largely new pitching staff in 2023. The only returning SIUE pitcher who made a start last year is [Taylor Bruninga](#).

GOOSE EGGS: SIUE shut out UT Martin in back-to-back games April 2 and 3 last year, marking the first time the Cougars have recorded shutouts in back-to-back OVC games. It is just the second time since SIUE moved to Division I that it has recorded consecutive shutouts.

PRESEASON PROGNOSTICATIONS: Before the season, the OVC's head coaches and sports information personnel tabbed SIUE for a sixth-place finish. D1Baseball.com also picked SIUE for a sixth-place finish.