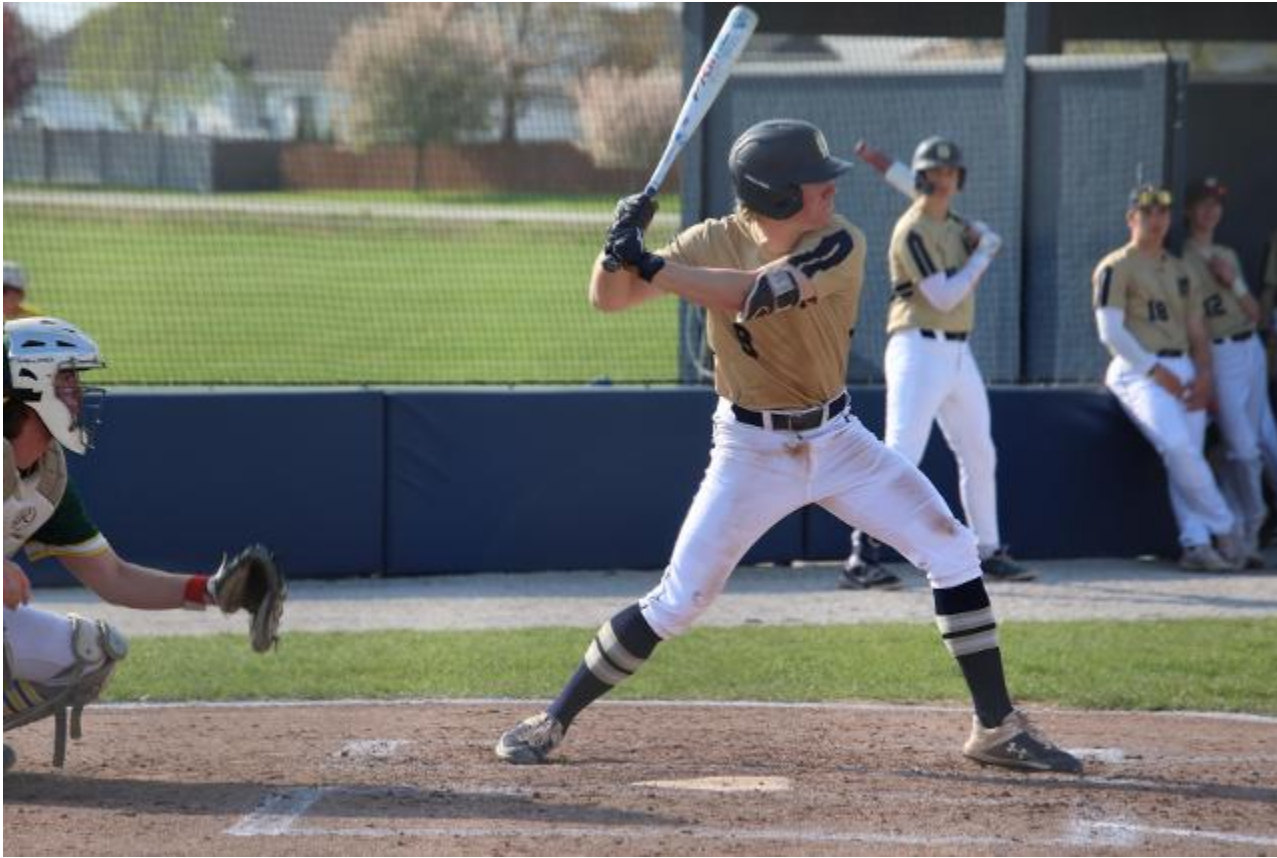


# **Last Season's Early Post-Season Exit Lights Fire For Griffins Who Are Ready To Get Back To State Championship Game**

by Bradley Piros, Reporter  
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GLEN CARBON - The Griffins are still on the hunt heading into the 2023 season.

The Father McGivney Catholic High School baseball team was so close to winning a state title back in the 2021 season. Boasting a best-ever record of 31-7, the Griffins made it all the way to the Class 1A State Championship game but lost to Farina South Central by a score of 4-2.

They were there, they saw what success looked like, and they wanted more of it.

The Griffins got off to a shaky start in 2022, going 1-3 in their first four games including a not-so-great 9-0 loss to conference rivals Marquette Catholic.

They woke up though and proceeded to not lose a game during the month of April. The Griffins won 28 in a row from March 25 to May 12. They finished the 2022 regular season at 30-4.

Back-to-back 30-win seasons was definitely an accomplishment for the program, but they still believed they could win it all.

After beating Trenton Wesclin 8-5, the Griffins moved on to the Regional Finals where they met Mater Dei. The Knights pitched one of their best games of the season, only allowing four hits and striking out 12.

It just wasn't McGivney's day and they lost by a score of 2-0, ending their season relatively early for their standards.

After a summer game at Busch Stadium against Wood River, a 9-1 win for McGivney, they ended the season at 32-5.

The good thing about all that? It's the past. The Griffins are moving forward with those past bad memories as motivation to not let that happen again.

The team has the pieces returning to give it another shot.

The Griffins graduated four last season, Clayton Hopfinger, Thomas Hyten, Cameron Krause, and Darren Luchetti.

Hopfinger and Luchetti will both be a blow to the team's pitching department, but the bulk of the team returns.

Returning are the team's three best hitters on average, Daniel Gierer (.452), Jackson Rodgers (.444), and Gael Smith (.404). They have six others that batted above .300.

Hopfinger made nine starts last season and won all nine games. Gierer, Rodgers, and Smith made 26 combined starts going 19-4. Those three combined for 175 strikeouts.

Luchetti and Krause were the team's go-to relievers. Ryker Keller also helped in that department and he returns.

As for the schedule, it has its tough opponents.

The Griffins open on the road on Monday, March 13 against Vandalia. Their first two home games will be against Chicago Marist and Harrisburg on March 17 and 18.

Conference games are spread out throughout the season, with the two against Marquette Catholic coming on April 25 and 27.

Other difficult non-conference matchups include some familiar foes, Farina South Central and Mater Dei on back-to-back days in May.

McGivney is scheduled to play 34 regular season games, 16 of them at home.

That doesn't include a planned tournament down in Memphis, Tennessee where it's possible they meet up against last year's Class 4A State Champions Edwardsville.

The Griffins are also slated to get back to Busch Stadium, this time on April 23, once again against Wood River.

The goals are of course a third straight 30-win season and a conference title, but the thing that eludes the Griffins the most is that state championship.

They are ready to do whatever it takes to get there this season.