



# River Dragons Round-Up: Schedule Released, New Coach Named, Lots Of Returning Players, And First Ever International Signings

by Bradley Piros, Reporter  
January 23 2024 9:37 AM



ALTON - After the new year, the Alton River Dragons wasted no time in announcing some exciting news about the upcoming 2024 season.

The team, heading into its fourth season, will be looking to get back to the playoffs like it did in 2022, going on to win the Prairie Land Division and the Western Conference.

Alton will be looking to improve on last season's 20-35 record.

So, when does it get started?

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## **SCHEDULE RELEASED**

The River Dragons' complete schedule dropped a couple of weeks ago on Thursday, Jan. 4th. It can be found on the team's website [here](#).

Alton's season begins on Tuesday, May 28 against the O'Fallon Hoots. It will be the first of a four-game roadtrip to kick off the season.

The River Dragons' home-opener is Saturday, June 1st against the Dubois County Bombers of Huntingburg, Indiana. First pitch is scheduled for 6:35 p.m.

The season is 58 games long and including the playoffs runs through the middle of August.

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## **NEW COACH HIRED**

Shortly after the schedule release, River Dragons' general manager Dallas Martz announced the hiring of the team's next coach, Noah Suarez.

Suarez was recently named head coach at Eureka College and has had other head coaching experience at Philander Smith University in Little Rock, Arkansas.

While there, he helped relaunch a baseball program that hadn't been active for 45 years. In the 2022 season, he signed 21 players in two weeks' time and exceeded all expectations by winning 14 games and finishing third out of six team in the NAIA's Gulf Coast Athletic Conference.

Noah Suarez holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Salem University, which he earned in 2020. He furthered his education by obtaining a master's degree in business administration with a focus on sports and recreation management.

He used that degree immediately and gained valuable coaching experience as an assistant coach at Salem.

As a player, Suarez was an everyday starter as an outfielder and second baseman, boasting a school-record 80 stolen bases and contributing to Salem's record-breaking 26-win season in 2018.



"Noah Suarez's appointment as the head coach of the Alton River Dragons is nothing short of remarkable," Martz said in a release earlier this month. "His impressive accomplishments in such a short period of time speak volumes about his dedication, expertise, and unwavering commitment to excellence. We couldn't be more thrilled to have him leading our team to new heights."

Suarez will be the team's third coach in as many seasons. Darrell Handelsman was field manager in the team's inaugural season in 2021 and returned for following year.

Handelsman would step down and after a short interim stint from Martz, in came Richard "Scotty" Scott as his replacement.

Scott wasn't far removed from his won playing days, who a year prior was still playing collegiate baseball at the University of Hawaii. After an underperforming 2023 season, Scott and the River Dragons parted ways.

So, the team once again chose youth and will see how it goes in 2024.

"I want to thank Steve Marso and Dallas Martz for giving me the opportunity to be the River Dragons' next Head Coach," Suarez said in a release. "I look forward to putting together a high-caliber team for Alton and working towards getting back to the Prospect League championship."

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## **RETURNING PLAYERS**

The River Dragons were active in trying to retain a lot of their roster. The following players will be returning to the team this summer:

- RJ LaRocco - Senior Outfielder - San Diego, CA
  - Jackson Parrill - Sophomore Pitcher - Maryville, IL
  - Butch Chapman - Assistant Coach - Alton, IL
  - Eli Hoerner - Sophomore Outfielder - Freeburg, IL
  - Scott Detweiler - Senior Pitcher - Newbury Park, CA
  - Kyle Athmer - Junior Pitcher - Albers, IL
  - Lucas Johns - Redshirt Freshman Pitcher - Lake Butler, FL
  - Diego Murillo - Sophomore Infielder - San Luis Obispo, CA
  - Erik Broekemeier - Junior Infielder - Lebanon, IL
  - Tyler Martin - Redshirt Freshman Catcher - Missouri City, TX
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## **NEW SIGNINGS**

The River Dragons also spent a lot of time recruiting, some locally, others, not so much. The following players will be calling Alton their home this summer:

- Luke Parmentier - Sophomore Infielder - Bethalto, IL
- Joe Connolly - Freshman Infielder - Omaha, NE
- Ryan Geriffelt - Sophomore Pitcher - Chicago, IL
- Jordan Aquallo - Junior Pitcher - Brentwood, CA
- Cole Schrank - Junior Catcher - Rockford, IL
- James Theodore - Freshman Outfielder - San Marcos, CA
- Jack Gazdacka - Freshman Pitcher - Elmhurst, IL
- Bryce Louis - Sophomore Pitcher - St. Louis, MO
- Dane Stevenson - Senior Infielder - Mooresville, IN
- Dylan Mannino - Freshman Pitcher - O'Fallon, IL
- Jaron Schiera - Freshman Catcher - Sandwich, IL
- Ethan Smith - Freshman Pitcher - St. Louis, MO



A couple of key highlights include Parmentier, a 2022 Civic Memorial graduate, who is one of many Eagles turned River Dragon. In years past the team was led by experienced catcher and 2019 CM grad Bryce Zupan and most recently 2023 grad Bryer Arview bolstering down a spot in the infield.

Mannino, a standout pitcher at Belleville East High School, was one of the best in the dominant Southwestern Conference. He boasted a team-leading 1.37 ERA and was the team's No. 2 behind Zander Mueth, who was later picked 67th overall in last year's MLB Draft. Mannino should bring a strong arm with plenty of big-game experience to the River Dragons.

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## INTERNATIONAL SIGNINGS

For the first time ever, the River Dragons have brought in two players internationally.

Two freshmen, right-handed pitcher I-Hung Yeh and corner infielder Xianen Zeng, will be coming to Alton from National Taitung University in Taitung, Taiwan.



A statement released this morning (Jan. 23) had the following to say about the new signings:

*I-Hung Yeh, a right-handed pitcher known for his precise control on the mound, is expected to add depth to the River Dragons' pitching rotation. With his skills and determination, Yeh has the potential to become a key asset in the team's quest for success.*

*Xianen Zeng, a talented corner infielder, brings power to the plate and a strong defensive presence. His versatility and commitment to excellence make him a valuable addition to the Alton River Dragons' lineup.*

"We are incredibly excited to welcome I-Hung Yeh and Xianen Zeng to the Alton River Dragons family," said General Manager Dallas Martz. "These international signings represent a significant step forward for our organization as we continue to build a competitive roster. We believe that Yeh and Zeng's talent and dedication will contribute greatly to our team's success."