

McGivney Baseball Welcomes New Changes, But Goal Remains The Same

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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GLEN CARBON - Some things changed for the Father McGivney baseball program, but the goal remains the same; lift a state title.

Some would argue that the Griffins' drop back down to IHSA Class 1A ensures an easier road to the state tournament.

Head coach Chris Erwin doesn't see it that way.

"No, I don't. I know that the teams are strong," he said.

"The teams that have won it the last three years have all come out of the South. So, we'll have to meet up with one of those teams in a regional, sectional, or super. I think we've got a good shot as anybody to get back there, but it's going to be a tough road. There are great 1A schools down here."

Those schools include 2018-19 state finalists and last year's state champs Waterloo Gibault Catholic, 2022 state champs North Clay, and 2021 state champs Farina South Central, the team that beat the Griffins 4-2 in the final.

"Coming back down to 1A, the goals are the same as last year, get back to the state tournament and finish it," Erwin said.

The Griffins made it to the state final in 2021, ending up second. The following season they were bumped up to Class 2A per the IHSA's success factor. That lasted two seasons.

In 2022 McGivney saw an early exit from the Breese Central Regional final after a narrow 2-0 loss to Mater Dei. Last season, the team debatably at its best, went all the way to the sectional finals where it suffered a 6-3 loss to Columbia, the eventual Class 2A runners-up.

"We had a great season last year, but it wasn't where we wanted to end up," Erwin said. "We thought we had a good enough team to end up at the state tournament."

The 2023 squad had seven seniors on it, led by Daniel Gierer, Jackson Rodgers, and Gabe Smith. It also lost Sam Chouinard, Drew Douglas, Jacob McKee, and Riley Strack.

"That's a great core group of kids that we lose," Erwin said. "They meant so much to the program. I don't know if we're so much trying to replace them. We're trying to rebuild around the group that we have coming back."

Last year's seniors missed out on their freshman season due to the ongoing pandemic. But once they were able to get back on the field, they dominated.

The 2023 graduating class finished with a 100-14 career record. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, the team finished 4-15. Last year's seniors definitely left the program better than they found it.

"100 wins in three years is an amazing feat," Erwin said. "I'm proud of what they did and I'm proud of the stamp they left on the program."



The program must turn the page and look toward its key returning players to keep the tradition going. This year's seniors will be the last class that saw the state tournament trip.

"They felt like there's unfinished business," Erwin said. "They really wanted to get back there."

"This group of seniors will be the last group that went to the state tournament. They were freshman when we went in 2021, so I know they want to get back there."

"I think they have high hopes, they have high expectations, and I also think they have a good group to get there," Erwin said.

Another welcoming change this season is an addition to the Gateway Metro Conference in Belleville Althoff Catholic.

"I love it," Erwin said. "I think it's a great addition to the conference. They've got a great baseball program. They're going to help make us stronger."

Even with a new conference rival and playing in a lower class, the schedule remains more or less the same for McGivney.

It will once again travel down to Memphis, Tennessee to take part in the USA Classic later this month.

Last year McGivney beat two-time defending IHSA Class 4A state champs Edwardsville 6-4 in the championship game. The Griffins opened the season on a 29-game win streak, finishing last year at 37-2.

Besides the USA Classic, some key games include a March 15 date with North Clay, a March 26 trip to Gillespie, an April 5 date against Gibault, and a May 3 game against Farina South Central.

Of course, return the home and away games against GMC rivals Metro-East Lutheran, Marquette Catholic, Christ Our Rock Lutheran, and now Althoff Catholic.

"We have a tough schedule," Erwin said. "A lot of teams returning to the schedule. I'm excited about it. It's going to give us a really good challenge."

And it all starts on Monday, March 11 at 4:30 p.m. when the Griffins host Vandalia.

"Talking about it with the guys, we're just ready to play somebody," Erwin said. "We've been scrimmaging the last couple of weeks, guys are antsy. Monday's going to be fantastic."

