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Rivier University baseball on mission for winning season

By TOM KING

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NASHUA – The Rivier University baseball team is mad as heck and it won't take it any more.

"We're sick and tired of losing," Raiders coach Anthony Perry said, "and we don't want to be doormats any more."

The Raiders went 3-27 in 2014 and didn't have a single senior on last year's roster, but that bodes well for this year.

They went 2-5 on their Florida tour, which may not seem like a lot – but it was the best spring-break trip the program has had.

When Perry says the Raiders are sick of losing, he means it. Rivier has had six losing seasons in a row. The last non-losing year was 2008, when a Bill Maniotis-coached team went 16-16, 8-6 in the Great Northeast Athletic Conference. It was also the best season since the program's inception in 2000.

This year? They have a chance for a winning season, or at least will be more competitive.

"The difference is the leadership," Raiders coach Anthony Perry said. "We didn't have a single senior on the roster. Last year, with a lot of sophomores, I considered ourselves in a sophomore slump. This year, we want to get off to a good start."

This is the season that Perry, now in his fourth year as coach, has been pointing to. His first full recruiting class is rounding into upperclass form. The Raiders seem strong up the middle, it may just be an issue of improving offensively and getting pitching depth.

The Raiders are strong with Nashua South alum J.J. Montello, one of a half-dozen seniors on the roster, playing second base. Junior Taylor Black, the team's only All-GNAC player last year, will man short. Centerfielder David Cusack, who was recently named GNAC Player of the Week, is off to a .364, two homer, six-RBI start.

Montello is a huge key, hitting leadoff, and was leading the team hitting .370 at last look.

"He's the catalyst," Perry said. "He'll be a spark to our offense. He's a kid who worked his tail off in the weight room and in practice."

Senior Mike Scanlon, who can catch and play third, has walked seven times and had four hit-pitches already. Jeremy Ball, a junior outfielder out of Swanzey, is also back. So is

sophomore first baseman Adam Arkell.

Of course, pitching will be important. Senior starter Alex Mears of Salem, who transferred in last year, has a gamer type mentality that Perry loves. He's 1-0 despite getting touched up for seven runs in that start.

"Stats only tell you so much," Perry said.

Spencer Aquiar, a junior out of Malden, Mass., will be big coming out of the bullpen and as an occasional starter.

"He's the kind of guy who has the mentality to just come in and get outs," Perry said, while also talking up junior lefty Jon Chitkowski of Tewksbury, Mass., who is just getting some innings in after recovering from injuries.

Perry was happy with what he saw in Florida. With plenty of snow still left on the ground, he'd probably be wondering when the next time he'd see his team play again, but the Raiders have games this coming weekend in Waldorf, Md., against Gallaudet University, coached by former Nashua Pride player Curtis Pride, and St. Mary's (Md.). The next New England game the Raiders have scheduled is March 25 at Fitchburg State.

"We're getting closer (to clear fields)," Perry said. "Being a New England college coach, you have to be resourceful and know where the good turf fields are. Of course it usually comes down to money (to rent fields), and the Division I and II schools have more money than we do."

Right now, Perry is more concerned with getting more wins than he's had in the last three years. And there's a very good chance that will happen.

DWC WOMEN'S LACROSSE

One program that was absent from the local college spring schedule a year ago was Daniel Webster College women's lacrosse. Well, the Eagles are back, and speaking of good turf fields, they used Rivier's Raider Field to open their season this past Sunday.

It wasn't the best of debuts, however, as they fell to Husson College 17-2. Alexis Pavelock had both Eagle goals while goalie Madison Platte (Manchester) had 11 saves.

Natalie Nagle added an assist while Madeline Roulier had six draw controls and four ground ball pickups for the Eagles, who don't play again until they visit Southern Vermont on March 24.

First-year coach Bill Davidson has a roster of 13 so things are in much better shape than a year ago, when the Eagles weren't able to field a team. Pavelock and attackman Christina McHugh are the only seniors.

RIVIER HONOREES

Rivier has named its Student Athletes of the Month for February, and to no one's surprise, senior basketball standout Deanna Purcell got the nod as the Female Athlete of the Month.

Her stellar Raider career has sadly ended, but she went out in fine statistical style, averaging 21.4 points a game and 7.9 rebounds a game for the final month of her career. It's her sixth time with that honor.

On the men's side, volleyball standout Chris Markuson got the nod, as in 11 February games he led the team in kills with 104, kills per set with 3.35, and digs with 57.

He also tallied seven assists, eight serve aces and 17 blocks.

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