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Rivier University baseball team has made great strides

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NASHUA – A year ago this time, Rivier University baseball coach Anthony Perry may have raised some eyebrows when he said that last year's Raider squad may have been the country's best 3-27 team.

Well, it turns out there was a lot of truth to that premise, as a year later the Raiders finished 13-19 overall, but were 8-6 in the GNAC and made the conference tournament for the first time in seven years.

The Raiders were a different team in Perry's fourth year, as his first two recruiting classes came of age.

"I think the guys collectively just had the mental toughness to push through games and grind it out," Perry said. "They would talk with one another on how to attack hitters defensively and come up to the plate with a plan offensively.

"A junior or a senior might have a tough at-bat but he would go to a freshman or a sophomore and say 'Look for this, he's throwing this.' The team chemistry was the best I had in four years."

The Raiders lost a heartbreaking 1-0 conference playoff game to Lasell. Perry scoured the New England ranks looking for a final game for his seniors and found one as they dropped a fairly meaningless finale to Emerson this past weekend.

"Personally it was very gratifying to finally see the hard work and effort, not just by myself but that the kids put in the last four years," Perry said. "It was a good year."

And now they look ahead. For all of their depth, the Raiders lose some key seniors, including leadoff man J.J. Montello, of Nashua, No. 2 hitter David Cusack, and No. 4 hitter Mike Scanlon. But they could have as many as 15 seniors next year.

"It will be a challenge," Perry said. "The five seniors we lose were all keys and will be tough to replace."

Montello was the team's leading hitter at .372, but right behind him was junior starting shortstop Taylor Black, of West Springfield, Mass. Black hit .363, but he is seen as the center of next year's efforts.

"He's a key coming back," Perry said. "He's our No. 3 hitter and the every day shortstop.

Also, there's Jeremy Ball (.318, 14 RBIs) in right field. Those guys will be leaned on heavily as seniors."

Another key will be pitching. Perry feels he'll have a senior trio of Ed Soucie, Nick Pica and Jon Chotowski to build around. Soucie went 3-2, 4.40. Pica was 0-3 coming back from some injuries but in his last start he fanned 12 in 62/3 innings. Chotowski went 2-1 but will need to significantly lower his 5.82 ERA.

But there's more. Perry needs to keep a steady influx of players. He knew the last couple of seasons he wouldn't have room for more than half a dozen or so underclassmen. But now he will be on the lookout for more to balance things out.

"This year my goal is to bring in somewhere between 10-12 new players," he said. "I don't want a repeat of my second year when I basically had an all freshman team. I want my freshmen to be able to learn from my seniors.

"I think we'll have a good group of kids coming in. The one thing I look for is the hunger, the coach-ability."

Perry said making the GNAC was certainly worthwhile, and even though it was a tough loss, the game with Lasell was a classic to remember.

"It was such a great game to be a part of," he said. "Anytime you make the postseason, especially for the first time, you get great big-game experience.

"It's always tough to see a baseball season end. But we made such big strides. I'm not sure my kids realize this yet, but after a few days and looking back on it and when they come back in the fall, the kids will understand it and use it going forward."

Long time coming

The Daniel Webster College women's lacrosse team, after a year's absence, won its first game in nearly two seasons to end its return season at 1-11 overall, beating Mitchell 12-6.

The Eagles bade farewell to senior Alexis Pavelock, of Saratoga Springs, N.Y., as she completed her career with 35 goals and 38 points, placing her fourth all-time in both categories in program history.

She most likely would have been among the top two had low numbers, etc., cost her her junior season as the program had to take a one-year hiatus. But in any event, Pavelock finished with a game to remember, scoring three goals in a winning effort.

Top honors

Rivier's Student Athletes of the Month for March had a lacrosse goalie theme: women's lacrosse goaltender Danielle Moran, who had 72 saves for the month, and men's goalie Clark Plummer, who had 90 saves for the month and a 63 percent save percentage.

The Rivier men had a fine season, finishing 12-5 overall, but like the baseball team, the Raiders fell to Lasell 21-8 in the first round of the GNAC playoffs, on the road. Their goal remains to host a postseason game.

Rivier's spring season and athletic year has come to a close. For Daniel Webster, the baseball season has another week to go and the men's lacrosse team will be competing in the NECC tourney this week.