

Saxon Sports

Team chemistry provides catalyst for varsity baseball



Photo by Carrie Palmquist

Junior Jimmy Saris, who plays third base and pitches, works on his hitting during an intersquad scrimmage. Saris is expected to be a key player this year.

By Ryan Moss

Every time the Saxon baseball team took the field last season there was a plethora of media members and Major League Baseball (MLB) scouts in attendance. Pitcher Jay Sborz, who was a second round pick in the MLB draft, was the main attraction. However, with Sborz moving on, the Saxons are focusing more on the team as a whole.

"[This year] we don't have the circus with everyone focusing on one player. It is nice to have a group of individuals working together and fo-

cus on team unity," head coach Jeff Ferrell, who is in his fourth year as the Saxons' manager, said.

Already players such as senior Russell Blankinship and junior Nick Zahra are noticing a difference. "The team chemistry is a lot better this year than it has been in the past," Blankinship said.

"Last year we all relied on Sborz, this year we rely on each other more often," Zahra said.

Despite Sborz's departure, pitching is still considered to be one of the Saxons' strong points. Junior Jimmy Saris and Blankinship will anchor a rotation that Coach Ferrell called "stronger then

in some past years." Both Saris and Blankinship earned 2nd team All-Liberty District honors last season.

"Jimmy and Russell are our two aces and they can take us far," Zahra said. "We also have some other very good pitchers."

In addition to Saris and Blankinship the Saxons pitching staff also boasts juniors Chuck Eller and Josh Yearout as well as sophomore Brendan DiBari.

Even though Eller is a very good pitcher, Coach Ferrell will have a hard time taking him out of centerfield because as he said "Eller makes every play [out there.]"

While Eller mans centerfield, there are three other Saxons' competing for time in the other two outfield spots. Seniors Joey Love, Danny McLean and junior Kyle Fraser are all fighting for starting spots.

Zahra returns for the Saxons' behind the plate. Zahra, who was named 2nd team All-Liberty District last season, was third on the team in hits last season.

The makeup of the left side of the Saxon's infield will depend on who is on the mound. If Saris is pitching, Blankinship will start at shortstop with freshman Tommy Tysse at third base. When Blankinship is on the mound, Tysse moves over to shortstop and Saris goes to third base.

Junior Trey Olcott and sophomore Alex Dadisman are battling to start at first base while senior Adam Hoffer will start at second base.

With Sborz's departure the Saxons' not only lost a great pitcher, but one of their top hitters as well. Sborz led the team in home runs and runs batted in. To make matters worse, Jon Greenwich, who led the team in hits and batting average, graduated and has moved on to St. Louis University. These two departures leave the Saxons' looking for some offense.

"Our offense is going to be fine, our team is much deeper than it was last year and we can rely on a number of players to contribute multiple hits on any given day," Blankinship said.

The Saxons' enjoyed an offensive explosion during their two scrimmages. In a combined twenty innings against Robinson and West Springfield, the Saxons' offense went on a tear racking up 32 hits.

In addition to the loss of Sborz and Greenwich, the Saxons' also graduated three other players from last year's 14-10 team. Three other players who were on last year's team aren't with the Saxons' this year.

"You hate to see them leave. But, we'll go on with what we got and what we got is pretty good," Coach Ferrell said.

According to Blankinship, the Saxons' also benefit from having a very strong coaching staff. Joining Coach Ferrell are coaches: Ron Abrigo, Frank Witchey, Ralph DiBari and Mark Coleman.

"All of them are very knowledgeable and are willing to put in whatever time it takes," Blankinship said.



Langley Saxons

at

Madison Warhawks



Date: March 30 Time: 6:30 p.m.

Last season: Madison beat the Saxons three times last season

Key Players

SR. Russell Blankinship	SR. Johnny Ayers
JR. Jimmy Saris	SR. Matt Riffie
JR. Chuck Eller	SR. Chris Wimmer
JR. Nick Zahra	JR. Chris Sterbenz

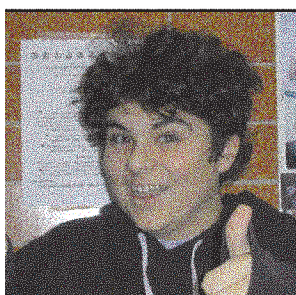
Saxons Sports Speak

Who is going to win the NCAA men's basketball tournament and why?



"Syracuse, because they beat Maryland and Maryland is the best."

- Jessie Jolles '07



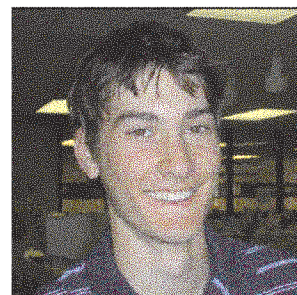
"UCONN, because Emeka Okafor is the best player in the nation."

- Nick Mostaan '06



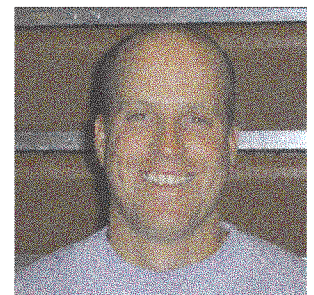
"UAB, because they are straight thuggin'."

- Angie Ortiz '05



"Duke, because of J.J. Redick."

- Ryan Ellis '04



"Duke, because they are used to being there and they can win in the clutch."

- Jamie Clark, P. E. Teacher