

'07 Red has full stable of newbies, but same mission

by Greg Schmidt, June 2007

Last year the Tri-City Red Legion team matched a club record with a dozen returning players and finished 30-10.

And this year? Well, the squad does return a talented and steady group of eight, but many of those will be asked to take on much larger roles.

Minnesota twice as nice

One of the returnees in particular will be easy to recognize in 6-5 right-hander Seth Rosin. His blue-chip talent and unlimited potential is known to all. That includes the University of Minnesota. The school offered him a scholarship to study and pitch for the Gophers. Six months after making his U of M commitment, his future took another great turn when the Minnesota Twins selected him in the draft two weeks ago. The hard-working Rosin had been informed about the possibility, but wasn't exactly sitting by the phone.



"I got the call when I was mowing the lawn," Rosin said. After receiving the message, Rosin returned the call to Twins' scout Mark Wilson to confirm his selection. "It was pretty exciting."

A formal contract is now in the works. "Once I get that offer I can weigh my options. It's a win-win situation so I'm not really stressing that much," Rosin said.

A Division I scholarship, a pending offer from the big leagues, but for now — he's focused on his final summer of Legion ball.

"I was just really excited to come back because I know it's my last year of [eligibility]," Rosin said. "It's exciting to play for coach [Jeff] Larsen one more year and with my friends one last time."

Back in Red

Rosin's return came as no surprise to Larsen, now in his 10th year as manager of the Red. "He had such great potential and now he's realizing that in a [big way]," Larsen said.

He continued: "Seth is going to do great in life — a very humble person like Derek McCallum [former Red shortstop] who was drafted [by the Twins]. "There's no big ego.... Playing for Red meant a lot to Derek and I'm sure it means a lot to Seth."

Larsen is more than thrilled to have Rosin on board for one final season and not just for the luxury of having a talented player, but more importantly, Rosin's dedication and work ethic. "He's a guy that's going to give 150 percent. He's there for whatever needs to be done," Larsen said.

Veteran quartet

And Rosin is not alone: he will be accompanied by fellow tri-captains Brandon Porten (.300-BA) and Brett Cleveringa (.368). Also back for a third summer is Blake Searles (.302). The four of them understand the demanding leadership roles they must provide.

“I had to go through my first year looking at some of the older guys, watching how they conducted themselves and just the history of the team, the tradition,” Searles said. “I definitely think it’s going to be a factor having some of us older guys to show the younger guys how we play and how we do things around here. There’s a time and place for everything, but when you come here it’s time to play ball.”



Front Row (L to R): Brandon Porten, Jake Lechner, Erik Fiegel
Back Row (L to R): Erik Anderson, Blake Searles, Seth Rosin, Brett Cleveringa
Not pictured: Brian Marshik

Added Larsen: “They’ve matured and are ready to lead. You just got to admire all these kids donating their summers for the team. They’re all good kids and great examples for the kids coming back.”

A few more vets, a bunch of newbies

Also familiar with the Red tradition are second-year players Brian Marshik (.377), Erik Anderson (.260), Erik Fiegel (.265) and Jake Lechner (.273).

That leads us to the newly anointed Red rookies. It’s a crowded dugout with one of the largest new crops in years, if not ever: Nick Colwell, Paul Myers, David Norgard, Brock Pedersen, Joe Phillippi, Dan Reichert, Jack Ries, Luke Ross, Matt Tetrick, and Tommy Thompson.



Front Row (L to R): Tommy Thompson, Luke Ross, Daniel Reichert, Nick Colwell
Back Row (L to R): Paul Myers, Brock Pedersen, David Norgard, Jack Ries, Matt Tetric
Not Pictured: Joe Phillippi

Said Rosin on the rookie invasion: “We’ve got to get all the jitters and all the rust out, but once we find out how to play together I think we’ll be in good shape. Added Searles: “We’ve kind of been spoiled the last couple years . . . with Derek McCallum and Brady Field — some really high quality players that a lot of teams usually don’t have, ever, but I still think that this is a really good group of guys — a group that can do good things.”

Rosin and Searles have proven prophets as the Red opened the season with three blowout victories outscoring their opponents 36-1.

The run production certainly appears on track, but the most important piece is still under construction. Larsen points to the all-important chemistry factor, especially with a full 18-man roster, something the Red has rarely done since the turn of the century.

This year a record eight schools are represented: Mounds View, Irondale, Hill-Murray, Totino-Grace, Concordia, Blake, UMD and St. Scholastica, But after only the team’s second practice, “You can see some pretty good camaraderie,” Larsen said. “It was a giant step forward in the chemistry area. I know in ‘99 we struggled with 18, but the chemistry worked. They all developed roles in ‘99.”

Leadership, chemistry, but what about skills?

The first area under the microscope in the early going will be the defense. The Red has been feared for years with that part of their game, but faces a huge challenge with the loss of standout glove magicians like McCallum (shortstop), Bjorn Anderson (third) and Chase Traeger (second). They certainly can't be replaced overnight.

For now, Larsen has penciled in Fiegel, Ries and Marshik at shortstop while Porten and Pedersen work third base. The right side of the dirt is a bit more crowded with Fiegel, Ries, Phillippi or Ross covering second. The first 90-foot marker has plenty of options with Searles, Cleveringa, Rosin, Norgard and Reichert — depending on the pitching duties.

Four-year plate protector Brady Field is gone, but Anderson returns with a ton of experience along with the youngster, Tetrick.

Another four-year starter, fence sentry Billy Gazich, is also not an easy glove to replace. But there are plenty of candidate including Marshik, Myers, Lechner, Thompson, Reichert, Colwell and Ross. "A lot of it comes down to, how they hit," said Larsen. And of course, how they field the ball. Larsen admits he was alarmed by the amount of miscues in the spring by several of the high school teams that feed the Red.

"It's no reflection on their coaches, but it will be something we'll work on," Larsen said. "The [errors] hurt the momentum and we're not a team that can afford a lot of them." Larsen noted the potential resemblance to the '97 World Series team: "They played great defense and could keep the momentum . . . We had some good pitchers, but at the end of the day certain [blue chip] ones couldn't throw every day and behind the rest of the pitchers the plays were made. That showed me a lot that year just how important [defense] is."

Depth in the bullpen

Red aficionados consider the '97 team the best defensive club in team history. Like that team, the '07 Red has a few premier arms, but also a lot of unknowns.

Included in Larsen's bullpen: Rosin (6-2, 61-IP, 54-SO, 2.42 ERA), Porten (6-1, 50-IP, 17-SO, 4.54), Cleveringa (3-2, 25-IP, 16-SO, 4.61), Searles (2-2, 30-IP, 16-SO, 5.21), Fiegel (4-1, 25-IP, 15-SO, 5.42), Reichert, Ries, Thompson, Myers, Anderson, Norgard and Pedersen. Depth is always the plan (nine pitchers recorded at least one victory last summer) with the Red's grueling schedule not to mention, injuries, etc. Last year the Red lost Adam Weber (football commitment) in the first week of the season and another, Sam Weber (injury) prior to the district playoffs.

"Those two I think were all-state caliber pitchers, but I think we got enough arms to get us through," Larsen said.

Swing the bat

Although plate stomping has flourished in the first three games, more difficult pitchers lay ahead for the Red's batting corps.

"I don't grade you on batting average. I grade them on plate appearances and good outs — moving the runners along," Larsen said.

Overall, the outlook is good for the Red.

“We have some good speed and versatility and Coach Larsen knows how to put guys in the right spots and we have good bats and we’ve got guys to fill in the pitching roles so I’m not to worried,” Rosin said.

Added Larsen: “We’re not worried about rebuilding . . . we reload.” Others have reloaded as well, including defending Fourth District playoff champ Hamline. The Hamchucks have 12 new players. The regular season slate is another 18-game grinder with each team meeting three times. Wood bats again will be the weapons of choice in district play.

No bus tickets

Aside from the roster, the most noticeable difference this season is the lack of bus rides. The Red will make only one out of town trip (Fargo).

“I knew we had a ‘new’ team and I don’t think the new guys deserve that right off. You have to earn that,” said Larsen, who is assisted again by Russ Poser, starting catcher for the ’99 World Series championship team along with newcomer Eric Helgason. “And the other thing is, it’s costly,” Larsen said. “We don’t want to do that if we’re not sure about them as a team. I just thought it was the right thing to do. It’s not a slap on the kids coming back, it’s more the kids coming up . . . What do we have? We’re not sure yet.”



(Above right) Russ Poser signs autographs for adoring local fans during the 1999 American Legion World Series in Middletown, CT; Pitcher Stephen Grasley and Coach Mark Paone look on.

One thing’s for sure — when they’re at their home field at Irondale, the atmosphere will be the same, as Bob Sheets returns to the microphone to continue his eclectic mix of tunes. By his side again will be scoreboard wizard John Traeger. “It’s wonderful. I really think that’s great,” Larsen said. “You have so many people that work that don’t have kids in the program. And the kids love it. It’s an atmosphere — a good memory for the kids.”



Front Row (sitting, L to R): Erik Anderson, Luke Ross, Matt Tetric.
Middle Row (L to R): Tommy Thompson, Erik Fiegel, Brandon Porten, Jake Lechner, Nick Colwell.
Back Row (L to R): Eric Helgason (Asst. Coach), Daniel Reichert, Paul Myers, Brock Pedersen, David Norgard, Blake Searles, Seth Rosin, Jack Ries, Brett Cleveringa, Jeff Larsen (Manager)
Not Pictured: Russ Poser (Coach), Joe Phillippi, Brian Marshik