

IRISH INSIDER

SPRING PREVIEW

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THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Suzanna Pratt and Steph Wulz

MEN'S LACROSSE

Stout backline thrives on symbiotic relationship



Observer File Photo

Irish senior goalie John Kemp prepares to clear the ball during Notre Dame's 9-1 win over Providence on April 7, 2012, at Arlotta Stadium. Kemp led the NCAA in goals-against average in 2012.

By **MATTHEW ROBISON**
Sports Writer

The Irish play on an artificial surface in Arlotta Stadium, but Irish coach Kevin Corrigan speaks about his team in natural terms. Corrigan describes the dynamic between his All-American senior goaltender John Kemp and the rest of the defensive unit as a “symbiotic relationship.”

“We have a good goalie so we can do certain things,” Corrigan said. “We have a good goalie because we do certain things. We try to put our goalies in a situation where they can be comfortable and know what they’re going to get on a consistent basis.”

As a preseason All-American pick, Kemp enters the season as the premier man between the pipes on the national scene. Last year, he led the nation in goals-against average at just over six per game.

But the credit does not go entirely to the shot-stopper. Kemp is surrounded by a culture of

defensive dominance, something Corrigan and the Notre Dame staff has carefully cultivated.

“It starts with that’s how we choose to build our teams,” Corrigan said. “There’s a commitment throughout our team to be a good defense. That affects the way you play offense, it affects the way you ride and clear. It affects the commitment with the personnel you have and who’s going to play and so forth.”

Assistant coach Gerry Byrne, who is in his seventh season as the team’s defensive guru, echoed Corrigan’s sentiments about the two-way dynamic between Kemp and the rest of the defense.

“You have to have confidence on a dual-directional level,” Byrne said. “You have to have confidence that John’s going to stop shots at a high percentage. There’s a confidence that John is great on certain kinds of shots. Like most goalies he struggles on some others. But we try to minimize shots he doesn’t like.

flank Kemp: senior Matt Miller and juniors Stephen O’Hara and Brian Buglione. Junior Mike Shephardson and senior long stick midfielder Tyler Andersen will offer their services on a consistent basis as well.

Miller gave Kemp some high praise. But he said he recognizes the defensive system plays right into a goaltender’s hands — or stick.

“Kemp would be the best goalie in the nation even if he didn’t play on our defense,” Miller said. “But I guess, we really kind of crowd the crease, I guess you could say. We always have good middies who guide them down the alley, having the slide ready, the backside push. Everyone knowing their role just helps to force the 12-yard shots down the alley that are pretty easy for Kemp to gobble up.”

It might be easy to consider the goaltender the last line of defense in a sport like lacrosse. If all else fails, he’s there to take a stab at the incoming shot. But in many ways, everything starts with the goaltender as well. He’s the axis around which the defense rotates.

“Technically, you can say I’m the last line of defense,” Kemp said. “But I think the philosophy that we have as a defense is that I’m part of it. The role that the goalie plays in lacrosse is much

bigger — obviously the first job is to stop the ball, but I think it’s a lot bigger than that — communication of the slide packages, where the ball is, running out the shot. There’s just a lot that goes into it.”

Although the attackmen are never allowed to cross the mid-field line, their play works into Notre Dame’s defensive philosophy as well. Midfielders play the full length of the field, so their performance is important on both sides of the ball.

The attack need to avoid taking poor shots to keep the opponent out of a transition game. The midfielders need to ride the opponent as they clear.

“If any of those pieces aren’t in place then you aren’t a good defensive team,” Corrigan said. “We know we don’t need to score 15 to win a game. But at the same time they’ve got a responsibility to making that be true. That’s something they do pretty effectively. I think they’re part of us being a good defensive team, rather than passive beneficiaries of us being a good defensive team.”

There are millions of examples of symbiotic relationships in nature, and Notre Dame has an example in its own backyard — it’s on the turf in Arlotta Stadium.

Contact **Matthew Robison** at mrobison@nd.edu

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SCHEDULE

Feb. 16 at Duke, 1 p.m., Durham, N.C.

Feb. 24 at Penn State, 12 p.m., University Park, Pa.

March 2 vs. North Carolina, 12 p.m., Arlotta Stadium

March 9 vs. Hofstra, 12 p.m., Arlotta Stadium

March 16 at Denver, 6:30 p.m., Denver, Colo.

March 20 vs. Ohio State, 4 p.m., Arlotta Stadium

March 24 at Rutgers, 1 p.m., Arlotta Stadium

March 30 vs. St. John’s, 1 p.m., Arlotta Stadium

April 2 vs. Marquette, 5 p.m., Chicago, Ill.

April 7 at Providence, 1 p.m., Providence, R.I.

April 14 vs. Georgetown, 11 a.m., Arlotta Stadium

April 20 vs. Villanova, 2 p.m., Arlotta Stadium

April 27 vs. Syracuse, 6:30 p.m., East Rutherford, N.J.



Observer File Photo

Irish junior midfielder Jim Marlatt attempts to drive past a defender during Notre Dame's 13-7 opening-round NCAA tournament victory over Yale on May 13, 2012, at Arlotta Stadium. Marlatt led Notre Dame in 2012 with 31 points in his first season of action.

TOP RETURNER

Senior goalie John Kemp is coming off a pair of stellar seasons in the Irish cage. As a sophomore in 2011, Kemp ranked second nationally in goals against average and earned honorable mention all-America honors as well as all-Big East accolades. In 2012 Kemp was a first team all-American and was one of 25 nominees for the Tewaaraton Award after playing all but seven minutes and 16 seconds in net for Notre Dame.

X-FACTOR

The X-factor this season will be consistent offensive output in the NCAA tournament. Though it's months away, the Irish offense will need to kick into overdrive when the tournament rolls

around. Last season Notre Dame scored just five goals in the national semifinal loss to Loyola. In 2011, the Irish fell in the NCAA quarterfinals to Duke after netting just five goals. In three tournament wins in the past two seasons, however, Notre Dame has averaged nearly 13 goals per game.

TELLING NUMBER

6.31. In 2012 Notre Dame allowed an average of 6.31 goals per game, the top mark in the nation. The Irish play a slower, grind-it-out style of lacrosse than many teams across the nation, yet their defense is still prodigious for any pace. With three of the four backline players returning for the Irish — Kemp, Miller and O'Hara — expect

more defensive dominance from Notre Dame. Junior Brian Buglione steps into the void created by the since-graduated Kevin Randall.

WHAT'S NEW

The Irish will be infused with new blood on attack with the arrival of freshman Matt Kavanagh. The 5-foot-8 rookie spent a year of prep school at Hotchkiss (Conn.) and was the nation's top-ranked post-graduate player according to Inside Lacrosse. Kavanagh led Team USA with 20 goals at the Under-19 World Championships in Finland over the summer and was named tournament MVP. Kavanagh netted a buzzer-beating goal from his stomach in Notre Dame's scrimmage against Detroit on Feb. 2.

WHAT'S NOT

Notre Dame returns eight of its 10 starters from last season. Kemp, Miller, O'Hara, Foley, Marlatt, Hopkins and Rogers started all 16 games while Doyle started 15 as a freshman. The Irish have a slew of contributing upperclassmen cycling in off the bench and are both deep and experienced. Irish coach Kevin Corrigan will be looking for similar results from a team that finished 13-3 overall, lost just one game in the regular season and ripped off a string of 10 consecutive wins from the beginning of March through the end of April.

BEST CASE

The Irish do just what they did in the regular season a year ago: dominate. Except this time they ride that momentum into the Big East tournament, where they make it out of the first round, make another run to the Final Four and explode offensively en route to a national title. The upperclassmen build on last year's success and newcomers such as Kavanagh and Buglione fill the voids left by last year's seniors without missing a beat.

WORST CASE

The Irish don't win the close games. The bounces don't go their way. Notre Dame won two overtime games in 2012, including a triple overtime thriller against Denver. The squad won three games by one goal and four

games by two goals. The Irish struggle to replace Max Pfeifer and Kevin Randall and teams follow the Loyola blueprint of shutting down Notre Dame's offense while finding ways to penetrate the typically stout defense.

2012 RECAP

The Irish began the season ranked ninth in the nation and bested No. 2 Duke 7-3 in the season opener. After losing to Penn State in overtime the next weekend, Notre Dame tore off 10 straight wins and ascended to No. 2 in the rankings before the Big East tournament. Notre Dame fell to St. John's 8-7 in the conference semifinals but still earned the No. 4 seed in the NCAA tournament. The Irish defeated Yale and Virginia in the opening two rounds before losing to Loyola 7-5 in the national semifinals.

GAME TO WATCH

The season opener, Feb. 16, against Duke in Durham, N.C. The No. 4 Blue Devils enter the 2013 campaign a spot behind the third-ranked Irish. This matchup has become a rivalry over the past few seasons. In each of the last three years Notre Dame, a typically dominant team in February, has defeated Duke, a notorious slow starter, in the Irish's season opener. In 2011 and 2010, however, Duke avenged those early losses by knocking Notre Dame out of the postseason. In 2010, Duke defeated the Irish 6-5 in overtime to win the NCAA championship.

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PROJECTED LINEUP

Goaltender: No. 1 John Kemp, Senior, 16 GS, 6.27 GAA, .637 save percentage
Defense: No. 9 Matt Miller, Senior, 16 GS, 30 GB, 18 CT
Defense: No. 4 Stephen O'Hara, Junior, 16 GS, 39 GB, 12 CT
Defense: No. 25 Brian Buglione, Junior, 2 GP
Midfield: No. 5 Jim Marlatt, Junior, 16 GS, 19 G, 12 A
Midfield: No. 15 Ryan Foley, Senior, 16 GS, 13 G, 8 A
Midfield: No. 17 Will Corrigan,

Sophomore, 16 GP, 5 G, 1 A
Attack: No. 12 Westy Hopkins, Junior, 16 GS, 18 G, 7 A
Attack: No. 18 Sean Rogers, Senior, 16 GS, 22 G, 8 A
Attack: No. 28 Conor Doyle, Sophomore, 15 GS, 13 G, 7 A
FO: No. 31 Liam O'Connor, Junior, 14 GP, 94-189 (49.7%) FO, 43 GB
LSM: No. 27 Tyler Andersen, Senior, 16 GP, 20 GB, 8 CT

GS = Games Started
GAA = Goals-against average
GB = Ground balls
CT = Caused turnovers
GP = Games Played
G = Goals
A = Assists

WOMEN'S LACROSSE

Halfpenny welcomes familiarity of year two

By CORY BERNARD
Sports Writer

Last spring, first-year coach Chris Halfpenny led the Irish to the NCAA tournament following a two-year drought. Now in her second season, Halfpenny doesn't need to focus on adjusting to a new school or a new roster. Instead, No. 9 Notre Dame can focus on returning to the tournament and challenging for a national championship.

"I think that every year has its own challenges, quite honestly," Halfpenny said. "Some things are smoother just because after a year here you start to get to understand the way things are done at Notre Dame. It's easier to understand their class schedules, academic timing of testing and things like that that you really do have to build it for mentality reasons."

It did not take Halfpenny long to adjust to the academic expectations placed upon Notre Dame student-athletes. In 2012, the team maintained a cumulative GPA above 3.0 and was named an Intercollegiate Women's Lacrosse Coaches Association Academic Squad. Halfpenny attributed her understanding of Notre Dame's academic demands to her previous coaching stops. She began her coaching career in 2001 as an assistant at Brown. From 2004 to 2006 she was the top assistant coach for Duke. And in her five seasons as the head coach of William and Mary, her players earned a combined 59 Colonial Athletic Association Commissioner's Academic Awards.

"I've had such similar stops with the academic-athletic parallel," she said. "Obviously drawing off my time at Duke but also just dealing with this style student athlete at the Brown and William and Mary and Duke stops. Nothing much there [was different academically]."

Though she understood the classroom lives of her players, Halfpenny said she had to learn more about the competition in an entirely new conference. Halfpenny had rarely coached against most of Notre Dame's Big East foes, she said.

"I would certainly say the Big East is the biggest difference [coming to Notre Dame]," she said. "Heading into this season it's nice to know I'm better. I didn't play that many teams in the Big East before I came here so it had been years since I had seen some of them."

Halfpenny said she also feels more familiar with the rest of Notre Dame's opponents this season. The Irish will host four ranked teams this year, including defending NCAA Champion and top-ranked Northwestern on April 24. The Irish will also travel to Syracuse to face the NCAA runner-up and No. 2 Orange.

"Coming right out of the gate we have Stanford," Halfpenny said. "We played them last year. Now I haven't seen them in a year, because we played them early and I hadn't had the opportunity to see them down the stretch at all. But now at least there's comfort because last year it felt like we were going, as a staff, again it was an opener so you didn't have that much film on them and you didn't know their tendencies. But I certainly feel a little bit more comfort with our opponents this year."

The coaches aren't the only ones feeling more comfortable in 2013. The players have had a year's worth of integration into Halfpenny's system and terminology, and the coach said her

team can communicate more easily this season.

"There's certainly a little bit of comfort for the upperclassmen," she said. "The upperclassmen are truly upperclassmen this year. The younger kids can ask an older

to be tapering. What does a taper mean?' when we're heading into a game week, whereas last year they'd be like, 'Taper? What does that mean?'

"They understand that this year. So I think it's certainly been

are more focused than ever at achieving success.

"We gave Northwestern all they could handle the first 52 minutes of that first-round NCAA game on their field and came up just short with unforced errors," she said.

"We really set our sights on being the best we can be each day taking it one day at a time, taking it one game at a time and being not just good and great but Notre Dame good, Notre Dame great. What is that? That's championships. That's competing for championships."

The Irish begin their search for a title at 6 p.m. Saturday in Palo Alto, Calif., against Stanford.

Contact Cory Bernard at
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"Some things are smoother just because after a year here you start to get to understand the way things are done at Notre Dame."

Chris Halfpenny
Irish coach

kid what to expect the first day of preseason and what to expect in week two and 'when she says this, what does that mean?' Or where we say, 'Hey we're going

more comfortable," Halfpenny said,

After bowing out in the first round of last season's NCAA tournament, Halfpenny said the Irish

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TOP RETURNER

Junior midfielder and co-captain Margaret Smith returns from a strong 2012 campaign, during which she compiled 47 draw controls, 37 ground balls and 31 caused turnovers. She also helped the Irish on the offensive end, scoring 12 goals on the season. As a unanimous preseason all-Big East selection, the Irish will count on Smith to contribute at both ends of the field. Her communication and leadership will also help determine the success of a young Notre Dame midfield unit.

X-FACTOR

Junior attack Lindsay Powell led the Irish in scoring with 44 goals in 16 games last season. But Powell suffered a season-ending torn ACL, her second torn ACL in her college career, shortly before Notre Dame's Big East semifinal game against Loyola. If Powell can return to last season's form, she will be a main catalyst for the Irish offense. But, if her recovery from her second ACL injury is not as smooth as her first, Notre Dame might have difficulty generating goals.

TELLING NUMBER

10.56. That's the average number of goals per game allowed by Notre Dame last

season. The Irish ranked 34th nationally in scoring defense and were tied with Boston College for the highest average of goals per game allowed among teams that finished in the top 20 of RPI last season. The Irish have proven they have the offensive firepower to win games, but they'll need strong defensive efforts to defeat their elite competition.

WHAT'S NEW

Although Notre Dame has successfully transitioned between head coaches, the team will look to adapt to two new assistant coaches, former Irish All-American Jill Byers and former Irish men's lacrosse stand-out Jake Marmul. As Notre Dame's career leader in goals, Byers will bring valuable expertise to the team's offense, while Marmul will look to apply the lessons he learned playing under Irish men's defensive coordinator Gerry Byrne to bolster the defense.

WHAT'S NOT

"It's nice to know that I have 21 girls on the team that know me this year," Irish coach Christine Halfpenny said. "Ten new faces, but 21 that really know me after last year getting a little bit more comfortable in our system."

Halfpenny's quote summarizes the depth and experience of this year's Irish team. Some of the team's main veterans



Observer File Photo

Irish coach Chris Halfpenny yells out instructions to her squad during Notre Dame's 12-11 win over Vanderbilt on April 18, 2012, at Arlotta Stadium.

include senior attacks Jenny Granger and Jaimie Morrison, senior goalkeeper Ellie Hilling and senior defense Emily Conner.

BEST CASE

"Once again, our sights are set on making it all the way to [Philadelphia] come Memorial Day weekend," Halfpenny said. The second-year coach has high expectations for her squad, but her goal of reaching the Final Four is attainable for this Irish team. The squad returns eight of 12 starters from last season and has considerable depth on offense, where it excelled last season. The Irish lost some key contributors on defense but will look to replace them with some highly acclaimed underclassmen and freshmen.

WORST CASE

Notre Dame struggles against a schedule filled with several of the top teams in the country. The Irish are slated to play five teams ranked in the preseason DeBeer Media Poll — No. 1 Syracuse, No. 2 Northwestern, No. 7 Loyola (Md.), No. 14 Georgetown and No. 20 Ohio State, in addition to a tough slate of Big East games. Notre Dame went 2-5 against the aforementioned five teams last season and will likely need to get by Syracuse and Loyola to capture the conference crown.

2012 RECAP

Notre Dame got off to a blistering start in Halfpenny's first season, winning its first eight games. The Irish finished the regular season with a 13-3

record before losing in the Big East semifinals and in the first round of the NCAA tournament. Under Halfpenny's new offensive sets, the team's scoring average climbed from 12 goals per game in 2011 to nearly 14 goals per game last season.

GAME TO WATCH

Northwestern has been the model program in women's lacrosse for the last decade, as the Wildcats have claimed seven of the last eight NCAA championships. The Wildcats defeated Notre Dame twice last year, but the Irish hung with them for much of the second game, a 12-7 loss in the first round of the NCAA tournament. This season, the two teams will meet in Arlotta Stadium on April 24, and an Irish win could do wonders for the national perception of the program.

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PROJECTED LINEUP

Goaltender: No. 33 Ellie Hilling, Senior, 10.9 GAA, 44.9 save percentage, 12-5 record
Defense: No. 29 Barbara Sullivan, Sophomore, 32 CT, 40 GB, 32 DC
Defense: No. 28 Emily Conner, Senior, 14 CT, 14 GB, 2 DC
Defense: No. 10 Leah Gallagher, Sophomore, 14 GP, 3 GB, 1 CT
Midfield: No. 13 Jenny Granger, Senior, 20 G, 12 A, 14 GB
Midfield: No. 22 Margaret Smith, Junior, 12 G, 47 DC, 31 CT
Midfield: No. 9 Grace Dooley, Junior, 4 G, 10 GB, 14 DC
Midfield: No. 2 Caitlin Gargan, Sophomore, 11 G, 4 A, 10 DC
Midfield: No. 21 McKenzie Brown, Senior, 8 G, 2 A, 22 DC
Attack: No. 18 Lindsay Powell, Junior, 44 G, 1 A, 23 DC
Attack: No. 14 Jaimie Morrison, Senior, 34 G, 8 A, 14 GB
Attack: No. 4 Kaitlyn Brosco, Junior, 22 G, 7 A, 7 GB

GAA = Goals-against average
CT = Caused turnovers
GB = Ground balls
DC = Draw controls
G = Goals, A = Assists

SCHEDULE

Feb. 16 at Stanford, 6 p.m., Stanford, Calif.
Feb. 27 vs. Ohio State, 6 p.m., Arlotta Stadium
March 2 at Duquesne, 12 p.m., Pittsburgh, Pa.
March 5 vs. Detroit, 6 p.m., Arlotta Stadium
March 9 vs. Boston University, 3 p.m., Arlotta Stadium
March 13 at Vanderbilt, 4 p.m., Nashville, Tenn.
March 22 vs. Rutgers, 7 p.m., Arlotta Stadium
March 24 vs. Villanova, 1 p.m., Arlotta Stadium
April 5 at Louisville, 5 p.m., Louisville, Ky.
April 7 at Cincinnati, 1 p.m., Cincinnati
April 12 vs. Loyola (Md.), 1 p.m., Arlotta Stadium
April 14 vs. Georgetown, 2 p.m., Arlotta Stadium
April 19 at Syracuse, 7 p.m., Syracuse, N.Y.
April 21 at Connecticut, 12 p.m., Storrs, Conn.
April 24 vs. Northwestern, 7 p.m., Arlotta Stadium
April 27 vs. Marquette, 1 p.m., Arlotta Stadium

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BASEBALL

Juniors Jagielo and Slania return to same team

By VICKY JACOBSEN
Sports Writer

When Eric Jagielo agreed to play for the Harwich Mariners last summer, he knew he was signing up to be one of the Cape Cod League's iconic "Boys of Summer." What he didn't realize was that he would be getting an introduction to live-stock management to go along with batting tips and exposure in front of major-league scouts.

The junior third baseman spent the summer living on a farm with host parents and four of his teammates, an experience completely alien to the native of the Chicago suburbs.

"We spent a lot of time with our host mom, helping her out on the farm, whether it was getting eggs from the chickens or wetting down the pigs when they got too hot," Jagielo said. "We definitely did mess around with the animals a little bit more than she probably would've liked us to, but it was also fun to learn some new things."

While Jagielo and his teammates were busy playing pranks on the farm, his Notre Dame teammate, junior right-handed pitcher Dan Slania, was enjoying time with his own host family and their two young grandchildren when he wasn't closing for the Cotuit Kettleers.

"The Riccis were unbelievable people," Slania said. "They had a couple of jet skis and a boat, and we would go down to the lake and hang out and have fun all day. Especially on off-days, it was a great way to have fun and relax."

But Slania and Jagielo didn't get too many of those days. Each Cape Cod League team played seven days a week, with just six days off during the 44-game season.

Slania, for one, wouldn't have had it any other way.

"The competition is so much fun," Slania said. "I would do camps in the morning, get a quick bite to eat, and then go right back to the field. So I would spend six hours a day at the field, trying to get better, learning from all the coaches and everybody."

The Cape Cod League has been one of the premier amateur leagues in the country since its inception in 1885, and both Slania and Jagielo relished the opportunity to compete with some of the nation's best college players.

"It's definitely more competitive [than college baseball], but it's also more fun," Slania said.

"It was kind of crazy to be playing with kids who will be going in the first round [of the major league draft] next spring and then becoming really good friends with them,"

Jagiello said. "There's an outfielder who goes to Stanford by the name Austin Wilson, and he was just a different type of athlete. You'll be hearing his name in the top five to 10 picks overall. I'm glad that he was on my team, and it was fun to play with him."

Not that the two Irish players were too shabby themselves. Slania's Kettleers went 30-14, winning the Western Division, the President's Cup and the Barnstable Patriot Cup. The right-hander played in the All-Star game and was named Relief Pitcher of the Year. Jagielo hit .291 with 13 homers and was named an All-Star himself, while the Mariners were Eastern Division champs.

But when it came to individual matchups, it was clear who came out the winner.

"I faced him twice, struck him out both times," Slania

little friendly competition."

The teammates were supposed to have another Notre Dame player join them on the Cape last summer, but junior

him, not only playing with him but going to the beach and all that kind of stuff," Jagielo said. "At least he's healthy now and this season should be fun to be back out on the field with him."

But for both players, the experience of playing on the Cape will not be easily forgotten.

"The community knew that you were coming in for the summer to play baseball and what they did at night for fun was to come out and watch you play," Jagielo said. "It was kind of fun to see how the whole community kind of revolved around the teams and the Cape."

Contact Vicky Jacobsen at vjacobse@nd.edu

"He got the best of me in those times in the Cape, but that's how baseball works."

Eric Jagielo
Irish junior third baseman

said. "I don't think he'll admit to that."

Jagiello, though, was willing to give his college teammate some credit.

"He got the best of me in those times in the Cape, but that's how baseball works," Jagielo said. "It's always good to have a

first baseman Trey Mancini was injured a few weeks into the season while playing for the Mariners.

"He was going to live with me, but he only got to stay there for a couple weeks, which was disappointing because I wanted to have some fun with

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TOP RETURNER

Notre Dame has a handful of talent returning for the 2013 season, but no one has garnered as much national attention as junior third baseman Eric Jagielo. He led the Big East with 13 home runs in 2012 to go along with a .310 batting average and 43 RBIs. Jagielo batted .291 with 13 home runs in the Cape Cod League this summer and has been tabbed by many as a potential first-round pick in the 2013 MLB Draft.

X-FACTOR

Notre Dame has one of the best closers in the nation in junior Dan Slania. He's available to come in and shut the door on opponents as long as the Irish can maintain a lead late into ballgames. The righthander led the Big East in saves (12) and appearances (31) in 2012. While there were talks of moving Slania to the starting rotation, Irish coach Mik Aoki said he will remain in his closing role for now. Whatever role he's used in, Slania will be a key contributor in 2013.

TELLING NUMBER

The number three has become an intriguing theme for

Notre Dame in 2013. In his third season as skipper, Aoki leads the Irish, predicted to finish in the No. 3 spot in the Big East by the conference's coaches. He will rely on a trio of third-year players, Eric Jagielo, Dan Slania and Trey Mancini to live up to their selections on the preseason all-Big East team. With a successful season, the Irish could be in contention for an NCAA tournament appearance, the third in school history.

WHAT'S NEW

Junior catcher Forrest Johnson will step into the starting role behind home plate, filling the void left by Joe Hudson, who was taken by the Reds in last year's MLB Draft. Notre Dame will rely on Johnson, who has appeared in just one career game, to handle Notre Dame's veteran pitching staff. That will be no easy task, but the Irish coaches were unanimous in their praise for Johnson, who all agreed he is Notre Dame's most improved player entering the season.

WHAT'S NOT

Jagielo and fellow junior Trey Mancini made for a formidable one-two punch in the middle of Notre Dame's order in 2012, and Irish fans can expect that same power this season. Jagielo and Mancini combined for 25 home runs in 2012, helping Notre

Dame lead the Big East in that category. Aoki said he expects both Jagielo and Mancini to be generating quite a bit of buzz come the June MLB draft.

BEST CASE

We see the Irish in Omaha this summer as they "establish [themselves] as a Big East contender and an NCAA contender," Aoki said. To do this, Notre Dame needs to win the midweek games and compete for all five games of the week at a high level. The Irish have a deep enough lineup of proven veteran talent and new young guns to do so.

WORST CASE

Notre Dame continues to struggle with confidence issues and gets overwhelmed by its schedule. The Irish have the toughest schedule in the Big East, with harsh non-conference games and road trips to co-Big East Champions Louisville and St. John's. Notre Dame will play 11 games against teams that reached the NCAA tournament, seven of those against teams that advanced to the NCAA Super Regionals or College World Series.

2012 RECAP

Notre Dame (31-27, 14-13 Big



Observer File Photo

Irish junior third baseman Eric Jagielo swings during Notre Dame's 12-4 win over Eastern Michigan on March 20, 2012 at Frank Eck Stadium.

East) had promising moments last season, but hit a mid-season wall that took too long to overcome, Aoki said. "I think our confidence eroded sometimes when we lost a couple of tough games on the road or in the conference and then lost a game that on paper we weren't supposed to lose," he said. Notre Dame made it to the semifinals of the Big East tournament, but a heartbreaking 2-1 loss to St. John's ended its run.

SERIES TO WATCH

There will be a wait for this series, as it takes place on May

11 and 12, but the wait will be well worth it. Last season in conference play, St. John's swept the Irish at Eck Stadium in a three-game series, 6-4, 6-4, 3-1 respectively. When the two teams met again in the Big East tournament, the Red Storm routed the Irish in the first round 12-2. After advancing through two elimination games against Rutgers (9-0) and Seton Hall (4-3), Notre Dame was once again shut down by the Red Storm 2-1 in the semifinals and was eliminated from the tournament. St. John's won the Big East last year and advanced to the Tuscon Super Regional, finishing with a 40-23 record. The Irish will seek vengeance against St. John's at Jack Kaiser Stadium in Queens, N.Y. in May.

PROJECTED LINEUP

C: No. 30 Forrest Johnson, Junior, Did not play in 2012
1B: No. 3 Trey Mancini, Junior, .317 avg, 47 runs, 45 RBI
2B: No. 35 Frank DeSico, Senior, 75 hits, 13 SB, 174 assists
3B: No. 7 Eric Jagielo, Junior, .546 slugging percentage, 13 HR, 15 2B
SS: No, 15 Jason McMurray, Sophomore, 53 assists, .261 avg, 6 extra-base hits
RF: No. 13 Mac Hudgins, Sophomore, .976 field percentage, .331 OBP, 2 errors
CF: No. 20 Charlie Markson, Senior, .390 OBP, 10 HBP, 19 SB

LF: No. 10 Conor Biggio, Sophomore, 7 SB, .308 OBP, 0 GDP
DH: No. 19 Ryan Bull, Sophomore, 27 BB, 8 2B, 1 GDP
SP: No. 18 Sean Fitzgerald, Junior, 27 appearances (7 starts), 3.82 ERA, .268 opp avg
SP: No. 1 Adam Norton, Senior, 15 starts, 98.0 IP, 4.32 ERA, 7 BB
SP: No. 11 David Hearne, Freshman
SP: No. 5 Nick McCarty, Freshman
Set-up: No. 51 Donnie Hissa, Junior, 25 appearances, 0 HR, 5.27 ERA
Lefty set-up: No. 16 Zak Kutsulis, Freshman
Closer: No. 40 Dan Slania, Junior, 12 saves, 31 appearances

SCHEDULE

Feb. 16 vs. Florida Gulf Coast, 2:30 p.m., Sarasota, Fla.
Feb. 16 vs. Ohio State, 6 p.m., Sarasota, Fla.
Feb. 17 vs. Mercer, 12 p.m., Sarasota, Fla.
Feb. 22 vs. Tulane, 5:30 p.m., New Orleans
Feb. 23 vs. Tulane, 1 p.m., New Orleans
Feb. 24 vs. Tulane, 11 p.m., New Orleans
March 1 vs. Massachusetts, 3 p.m., Cary, N.C.
March 1 vs. Tennessee, 6:30 p.m., Cary, N.C.
March 2 vs. Virginia Tech, 6 p.m., Cary, N.C.
March 3 vs. Rhode Island, 11 a.m., Cary, N.C.
March 8 vs. UCLA, 9 p.m., Los Angeles
March 9 vs. USC, 5 p.m., Los Angeles
March 10 vs. Oklahoma, 7 a.m., Los Angeles
March 12 at UC Santa Barbara, 6 p.m., Santa Barbara, Calif.
March 14 at Cal Poly, 12 a.m., San Luis Obispo, Calif.
March 15 at Cal Poly, 12 a.m., San Luis Obispo, Calif.
March 16 at Cal Poly, 10 a.m., San Luis Obispo, Calif.

March 22 vs. Seton Hall, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
March 23 vs. Seton Hall, 2:05 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
March 24 vs. Seton Hall, 12:05 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
March 25 vs. Kent State, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
March 26 vs. Kent State, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
March 28 at Louisville, 6 p.m., Louisville, Ky.
March 29 at Louisville, 6 p.m., Louisville, Ky.
March 30 at Louisville, 1 p.m., Louisville, Ky.
April 2 vs. UIC, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 3 vs. Valparaiso, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 5 vs. Villanova, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 6 vs. Villanova, 2:05 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 7 vs. Villanova, 1:05 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 9 vs. Michigan, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 10 vs. Eastern Michigan, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 12 at Pittsburgh, 6 p.m., Pittsburgh
April 13 at Pittsburgh, 3 p.m., Pittsburgh
April 14 at Pittsburgh, 12 p.m., Pittsburgh
April 16 at Michigan, 4:05 p.m., Ann Arbor, Mich.

April 17 vs. Bowling Green, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 19 vs. Quinnipiac, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 20 vs. Quinnipiac, 3:30 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 21 vs. Quinnipiac, 1:05 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 23 vs. Toledo, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 24 vs. Michigan State, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 26 vs. Connecticut, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 27 vs. Connecticut, 2:05 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 28 vs. Connecticut, 1:05 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
April 30 at Central Michigan, 4:05 p.m., Mount Pleasant, Mich.
May 3 vs. USF, 5:35 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
May 4 vs. USF, 2:05 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
May 5 vs. USF, 1:05 p.m., Frank Eck Stadium
May 11 at St. John's (double-header), 12:00 p.m., Queens, N.Y.
May 12 at St. John's, 1:00 p.m., Queens, N.Y.
May 14 at Western Michigan, 3 p.m., Kalamazoo, Mich.
May 16 at Cincinnati, 6:30 p.m., Cincinnati
May 17 at Cincinnati, 6:30 p.m., Cincinnati
May 18 at Cincinnati, 1 p.m., Cincinnati

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