

# Bearcats Endure Second Straight Tough Year

Lost in the fact that the 2004 edition of the University of Cincinnati baseball team suffered through a second straight tough season, with a 15-40 record and a third straight shutout from the Conference USA Tournament are many positives that will carry the Bearcats through their final season in Conference USA in 2005 and into the first campaign in the BIG EAST Conference a year later.

The most obvious of the high marks was the opening of the brand new, state-of-the-art UC Baseball Stadium. In addition to the new venue, the Bearcats enjoyed the development of several key players that will lead the Bearcats for the next two seasons. Jack Nelson emerged as one of the top hitters in C-USA, while Mark Muscenti and Jon DeLuca showed the potential to be outstanding players.

Thanks to many highlights along the way, the 2004 season can be marked down as one final year of retooling as UC makes its move to the next level of collegiate baseball.

## Finding A Way

For the second straight season, second baseman Mark Muscenti found a variety of ways to contribute to the Bearcat offense. Muscenti finished his sophomore campaign with the third-highest on-base percentage on the squad (.422), partly due to 22 walks and a team-high 19 hit by pitches. After leading Conference USA in hit by pitch in 2003, Muscenti finished second in 2004. During his career, Muscenti has been hit a school record 37 times, three better than Kevin Youkilis' total. Muscenti also hit a career-best .283 with 24 RBI in 2004.

## Nelson An Impact Player

Sophomore Jack Nelson made his presence known during the 2004 season, as he ranked second on the team and 10th in Conference USA with a .360 batting average. Nelson also drove in 33 runs, while adding a team-best 14 doubles and hitting seven home runs. UC's starting first baseman also put together several breakout performances, one of which earned him a spot in the school record book. Against Louisville early in the season, Nelson tied a UC mark by doubling three times in a single game. Later in the season, Nelson did something no Bearcat player had done in nearly two years when he recorded five hits vs. East Carolina. Nelson's final breakout performance came with a two-homer game vs. Saint Louis.



## Bearcats Open UC Baseball Stadium

May 20, 2004 will go down as a great date in University of Cincinnati Baseball history as the Bearcats opened the gates to the UC Baseball Stadium for the first time. After playing their home games off-campus for the past two seasons, the Bearcats were able to open the new facility in time for the season-closing three-game series vs. UAB.

Playing in front of an estimated crowd of 2,200, the opening contest saw the visiting Blazers pound five home runs in dropping the Bearcats by a 14-3 score. In a night of firsts, UC redshirt freshman Brian Beltz picked up the first base hit in the new facility when he lined a single to center in the bottom of the first.

After dropping their first two contests in the stadium, the Bearcats bounced back to hand the Blazers a 7-4 setback in the series and season-finale two days later. Sophomore Jon DeLuca excited the home crowd when he ripped a go-ahead three-run homer in the bottom of the sixth to propel the Bearcats to the win.

For the weekend, an estimated crowd of over 3,300 watched the Bearcats on the diamond in the new venue. The weekend total nearly doubled the UC home attendance from the first nine contests of the year, all played at Midland Field in nearby Amelia.

## Youth Is Served

The Bearcats enjoyed a youth movement in their infield during the 2004 season and the four regular starters, all sophomores, delivered increased offensive production from their first collegiate campaign.

The foursome of 1B Jack Nelson, 2B Mark Muscenti, 3B Jon DeLuca and SS Drew Saylor batted a combined .308, with 122 runs scored, 46 doubles, 21 home runs and 129 RBI, bettering the group's combined output from their freshman campaigns.

In addition, both Nelson and Saylor finished the year hitting over .300, something none of the foursome did as freshman.

All totaled, UC's "super sophomores" started a total of 194 games, with all but DeLuca, drawing at least 45 starting nods.

## Helping Himself

During his senior year, Aaron Moll found a new way to contribute. In addition to being a regular starter in the outfield, he also took a stab at pitching for the first time in his collegiate career. By season's end, Moll had developed into UC's number one starter.

Despite an ERA of 6.75, Moll picked up three pitching victories, including a defeat of nationally-ranked Tulane. Moll also turned in a seven-strikeout, eight inning win against TCU, while hurling nine shutout frames in a no-decision at Memphis.

While he was on the mound, Moll also doubled as the Bearcats' designated hitter and helped himself on many occasions. In his 10 starts on the mound, Moll batted .300 with four doubles, two homers and eight RBI.

## Pick's Dominant Career

Despite playing just two seasons at UC, Steve Pickerell will go down as one of the most explosive players ever to don a Bearcat uniform. With a .683 slugging percentage, Pickerell finished his career ranked first in school history in that category. His .438 on-base percentage ties him for fifth all-time, while his .350 batting average ranks eighth.

In his two seasons, Pickerell launched a total of 26 home runs (seventh in UC history) in just 303 at-bats, good for one home run every 11.7 at-bats. He also drove in 77 runs, while adding 21 doubles and drawing 49 walks. Pickerell clearly drew the respect of opposing pitchers as five of the 49 free passes were intentional.