

Young Bearcats Experience Growing Pains, Tough Year

The 2003 season provided one challenge after another for the University of Cincinnati baseball team and ended with a disappointing 15-39 record. Youth was the name of the game for UC as five freshmen started a combined 171 games.

The Bearcats also faced the inconveniences of not having an on-campus home field after the tearing down of Johnny Bench Field in anticipation of the new stadium set to open in 2004. The 2003 season will go down as one of transition, but should pay dividends thanks to the experience gained by UC's newcomers.

Freshmen Impact

The Bearcats got another year of solid contributions from their freshman class in 2003, as a trio of players proved to be big contributors. Redshirt freshman Mark Muscenti led the team in on-base percentage (.384), while hitting .260. In addition, Muscenti led Conference USA with a school-record 18 hit by pitch. Drew Saylor wrapped up his first collegiate campaign ranked third on the team in hitting at .267, home runs (five) and RBI (24). Jon DeLuca was also tied for third in RBI and finished second on the team with 10 doubles.

The success of the 2003 freshmen class followed up years that saw Tony Maynard (2001) and Kyle Markle (2002) earn Freshman All-American honors.

One Run Blues

Who would have known when the Bearcats fell 4-3 to Duke in their season opener, that the one-run loss would be a preview of things to

Pick the Power Source

In his first season as a Bearcat, junior college transfer Steve Pickerell made his mark on the team by hitting home runs. Pickerell, who started 27 games at catcher and two more at DH, led the team and ranked eighth in Conference USA with 12 long balls in just 111 at-bats. Pickerell had a breakout performance against Xavier, as he equalled three school records by hitting three home runs and driving in eight runs, while walking three times and scoring four runs. Of Pickerell's 34 hits in 2003, 19 went for extra-bases, giving him a team-best .694 slugging percentage for the year. Behind the plate, Pickerell was also solid, throwing out 19 of 41 (46%) base stealers.

Borsa Closes Stellar Career

B.J. Borsa ended an outstanding collegiate career in 2003 with a bevy of school and Conference USA records to his credit. In a win over USF in late April, Borsa tied the UC career record for wins with 19, sharing the top spot with Tim Burman, Carmine Lemma and Curtus Moak. In addition to the wins mark, Borsa holds the school career marks for most games started (59) and innings pitched (363.0), while ranking third with 277 career strikeouts. In C-USA annals, Borsa is the all-time leader in complete games with 13, while ranking sixth in innings pitched. Following the season, Borsa signed a professional contract with the Cincinnati Reds and spent the summer playing for a Reds farm team in the Gulf Coast League.



come for UC in 2003. The Bearcats finished the year with a 3-11 record in games decided by one run, including five one-run defeats in Conference USA play. One of UC's one-run wins almost didn't happen as East Carolina mounted a ninth inning comeback in game three of the series. But the Pirates came up just short, leaving the tying run on third base in the last inning.

Making the Switch

After a standout season as the Bearcats' closer in 2002, senior Nate Bouldin was asked to make the switch to the starting rotation in 2003 and the results proved to be outstanding. For the season, Bouldin led the Bearcats with six wins, while posting a 5.34 ERA. Despite being handed a hard luck loss, Bouldin threw his first career complete game against Southern Miss and added his second, again in a loss, against USF. Bouldin got his career as a starter off to a great beginning when he threw 7.1 shutout innings at Duke in his first collegiate start. For his efforts, Bouldin was rewarded as C-USA's Pitcher of the Week.

Filling a Void

Rob Reel made the most of his senior year in 2003, filling the top spot out of the Bearcat bullpen. After appearing predominately as a starter in 2002, Reel led the team with 29 appearances and a team-best 3.27 ERA. Reel excelled handling a variety of roles ranging from long relief to closer, finishing with a 2-1 record and two saves.

Streaking Cat

Drew Saylor wrapped up the 2003 season as the hottest hitting Bearcat and he will be out to carry that momentum into the new year. Saylor finished his freshman campaign riding a nine-game hitting streak in which he hit .400. After taking over the starting second base job for the final 12 games of the year, Saylor responded by hitting .383 during the span and committed just two errors in 65 total chances, while putting together a streak of eight straight errorless games.

2003 - A Year Without A Home

With the March 2003 demolition of Johnny Bench Field, the Bearcat baseball team was forced to find a new home for the year.

Without an on-campus venue to play in, Midland Field in nearby Amelia, home of the Mount St. Joseph's baseball team and the Midland Redskins summer league organization, played host to 14 UC baseball games. Playing at Midland was far from friendly for the Bearcats as they posted a record of just 3-11 on Midland's grass.

Jake Smith was the hottest hitting Bearcat at Midland, recording a .364 batting average and clubbing three of his six homers on the season at Midland. Smith saved his best effort for last as all three of the blasts came on the last weekend of play vs. Charlotte, including a pair of bombs in the series opener.