

Jackson Academy wants to reach goal of a title

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Chasing an AISA state championship is something that has become commonplace for the Jackson Academy baseball team in recent seasons. It's winning the crown that has eluded the Eagles thus far, though they have been close to capturing the ultimate prize.

Once again this season, the goal is the same, and head coach John David Phillips said this year's team has the ingredients to make another run at the title.

"We always have high expectations and this year is no different, and probably moreso this year than any year since I've been here," Phillips said. "We've got a lot of guys coming back; we basically only lost one starter off the team that was three outs away from going to the (state) finals last year. And we've picked up another couple of guys."

Phillips said last year's close call has only served to push this year's team even more to make a run at the championship.

"Last year we were really young from an experience standpoint and we're going to be the polar opposite of that this year," he said. "We've got experience coming back at just about every position. This will definitely be the deepest pitching staff that I've had since I've been here. We're expecting big things from this group."

Mathew Windham and Devin Pitre were both AISA all-stars last year as pitchers and they'll be two of the players back on the hill for the Eagles. Jack Fleming, who had a huge win in the third game of the quarterfinals last year with a 1-0 shutout as a freshman, is also back. Sophomore Cameron Schmidt makes his return to the pitching staff along with Lane Mizell and his brother M.J. Mizell. This will be the Mizell's first season at Jackson Academy.

P.J. Fleming was strong in his work as the Eagles' closer last season and he is returning to that role this year. "He was outstanding in that capacity," Phillips said. "He finished with an ERA just a shade over 1.00."

Phillips said the Eagles will also look to Micah Roberts and Kii Steed to help on the mound as well, giving Jackson Academy a lineup full of those who will see action as pitchers. "They didn't get much game experience last year



Mathew Windham

but their arm strength has definitely improved," Phillips said. "The combination of all those guys, and if we stay healthy, pitching should definitely be a strength for us this year."

Offensively the Eagles lose Chipper Tucker, who hit close to .400 the past two seasons, and his production will have to be replaced at the top of the lineup. Windham, Pitre and Jay Kinman will all be guys at the top of the lineup who will be counted on "to be the tablesetters and run producers," Phillips said.

"We've got some guys with some speed — Micah Roberts and Kii Steed — who will also have an opportunity to hit near the top of the lineup. We've got most of our lineup back from last year. Jack Fleming really came on toward the end of the year and Cameron Schmidt had some good stretches also. We've got a big senior class.

"Mathew, Devin and Jay need to lead the way for us. We need to improve our offense. Pitching carried us most of last year but I felt like we underperformed offensively and defensively. We've got to improve in both areas if we want to get where we want to be at the end of the year."



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