

BASEBALL

Making a Pitch for a Title

Returning pitcher Steve Guzski '10 will help guide the Yellowjackets.

By Ryan Whirty

When Yellowjacket senior pitcher Steve Guzski '10 takes the mound this spring, he'll have his sights focused on a Liberty League title and a deep run in the NCAA regional tournament. Like all Rochester hurlers, Guzski would love to end his collegiate career with a bang.

But Guzski also is thinking further ahead. As Rochester's lone returning conference starter, he'll be charged with shepherding eight freshmen pitchers who are replacing a stellar graduating class. By teaching the youngsters the ropes, Guzski hopes to help set up the program for the future.

"I have only one year left," Guzski says, "but they have their whole careers. I want this season to be a great stepping stone for future success."

If last season is any indication, the 2010 campaign looks like a promising one. The Yellowjackets went 30-13 in 2009, setting a school record in wins, claiming the UAA championship, and finishing second in the Liberty League.

Head coach Joe Reina notes that, on paper at least, 2009 was the Yellowjackets' best season ever, and he says this year's squad has the potential to be just as good. The key will be how quickly a young team loaded with potential but short on experience can acclimate itself to the college level.

That's where Guzski comes in. After going 3-3 with a 3.44 ERA and 28 strikeouts last season, the New Hartford, N.Y., native is poised for a breakout year, not only statistically but also as a leader. The pressure will be high, but Reina says Guzski thrives when the heat is on.

"Anytime you're a conference pitcher, there's pressure," Reina says. "But this year Steve also has to take on a leadership role. The young guys will be looking to him and how he reacts in pressure situations."

Guzski will be helped by new pitching coach Pete Dawes, a longtime assistant at Monroe Community College whom Reina has known since Reina's days as a player.



While Dawes hasn't seen Guzski in action until this spring, he can tell that Guzski has what it takes to shine on the mound and in the clubhouse.

"His strength is his maturity," Dawes says. "He's mature enough to handle whatever teams throw at him."

The Yellowjackets open the 2010 season in early March with a trip to Florida that

▲ **TEAM LEADER:** As the Yellowjackets' only returning conference starter, Guzski is expected to provide leadership on and off the pitching mound.

includes the UAA tournament. The Yellowjackets haven't made the NCAA tourney since 1999, and they hope that drought ends this year. But to make it happen, a lot of inexperienced players, with Guzski as their guide, will have to become good very fast.

"We have some guys who didn't get a lot of playing time last year," Reina says. "They need to step up and fill some big shoes, because the younger guys will get that opportunity." ®

Ryan Whirty writes about sports for Rochester Review.