

## Personnel Breakdown

### Top Returners

#### Aaron Heilman (Sr., RHP)

- Preseason 1st Team All-American
- Career: 28-7, 2.80 ERA, 314 Ks
- 2000: 10-2, 3.21 ERA, 118 Ks

#### Alec Porzel (Sr., SS)

- Preseason BIG EAST Player of the Year (*Collegiate Baseball*)
- Career: .317, 29 HR, 158 RBI
- 2000: .342, 9 HR, 58 RBI, 10 SB

#### Steve Stanley (Jr., CF)

- Second Team All-BIG EAST ('99)
- Career: .344, 53 SB, 103 R
- 2000: .362, 29 SB, 24 RBI, 51 R

#### Paul O'Toole (Jr., C)

- Preseason All-BIG EAST Team
- Career: .309, 16 HR, 78 RBI
- 2000: .302, 8 HR, 39 RBI, 16 SB

#### Brian Stavisky (So., RF)

- Preseason 1st Team All-American
- 2000: .298, 14 HR, 45 RBI, 5 3B
- Preseason BIG EAST Player of the Year (*Baseball America*; BE coaches)

### Top Players Lost

#### Scott Cavey (Sr., RHP)

- Career: 15-4, 4.20 ERA, 138 Ks
- 2000: 6-3, 4.58 ERA, 61 Ks/22 BB

#### Jeff Felker (Sr., 1B)

- Career: .311, 232 HR, 155 RBI
- 2000: .307, 7 HR, 51 RBI, 21 2B

#### John Corbin (Sr., RHP)

- Career: 13-7, 20 SV, 4.64, 112 Ks
- 2000: 5-4, 11 SV, 4.69, 54 Ks

### Top Newcomers

#### Steve Sollmann (Fr., 2B)

- Cincinnati, OH (St. Xavier HS)
- Tri-state area male athlete of year

#### Joe Thaman (Fr., 1B/LHP)

- St. Louis, MO (St. Louis Univ. HS)
- Defensive whiz at first base

#### Aaron Edwards (Fr., RHP)

- Chambersburg, PA (Chambersburg HS)
- Preseason BIG EAST Rookie of the Year (*Baseball America*)

## Experience the Difference

### Ninth-ranked Notre Dame baseball team looks to build off NCAA Tournament lessons during promising 2001 campaign.

Experience is a tricky thing in the world of competitive sport. More often than not, achieving success on a high level requires a certain level of experience that backs up the play on the field. Yet the process of attaining that experience often can be a painful one.

Such is the case for the 2001 Notre Dame baseball program, which took part in a whirlwind—literally—NCAA Regional Tournament last spring at Mississippi State. The Irish won a pair of elimination games in that tournament—including one that was delayed past midnight due to a nearby tornado—before dropping a back-and-forth title game versus the host Bulldogs, losing 10-9 on a home run in the ninth inning to cap a 46-18 season.

After the Irish had returned to campus, head coach Paul Mainieri addressed the team by making reference to the "Rocky" character portrayed in the popular series of motion pictures. His message was simple: Rocky lost the first title fight but he came back to win the second ... and he did so because of the experience and lessons he had learned the first time around.

"That experience at Mississippi State really whet the team's whistle and gave them a taste of how close they truly are to getting to the College World Series and making a very strong statement to college baseball that Notre Dame is here and here to stay," said Mainieri, whose

squad ironically will begin the 2001 season on the same field where it ended in 2000, as a participant in Mississippi State's National Bank of Commerce Classic.

"This team is going to have a lot of resolve due to how close it came last year to reaching its ultimate goal. They know it takes a lot of hard work and focus throughout the whole year. And they are willing to commit themselves to doing what it takes to accomplish those goals."

At the time Notre Dame trudged off Mississippi State's Dudy-Noble Field to end its 2000 season, the Irish knew they likely would be returning nine of their top 10 hitters and six pitchers with significant experience on the college level. What they didn't anticipate was returning to school in the fall with three-time All-America pitcher **Aaron Heilman** (Logansport, Ind.) still a member of the Irish roster.

Heilman—whose career stats at Notre Dame include a 28-7 record, 14 saves, a 2.80 ERA, 314 strikeouts in 280 innings and an 18-strikeout game last season



The unexpected return of three-time All-American Aaron Heilman elevated Notre Dame to a spot as high as the top 10 in the national polls.

at West Virginia—was the 31st selection of the 2000 Major League Amateur Draft but never signed with the Minnesota Twins. And once the 6-5, 225-pound righthander had attended his first class of the 2000 fall semester, Heilman officially was back for his senior season.

Now that he's back, Heilman has the chance to become just the 17th Notre Dame student-athlete ever to be a four-year All-American (he already is the baseball team's first three-year honoree) and could become just the fifth Notre Dame student-athlete competing in a team-oriented sport to post a fourth All-America season.

"The fact that Aaron decided to come back to Notre Dame speaks volumes about what is important in his life," said Mainieri, who is set to embark on his seventh season at Notre Dame with possibly the deepest collection of all-star caliber players during his tenure with the Irish.

"Aaron has said many times how much he loves Notre Dame. And he didn't want to give away that last year cheaply."

The return of Heilman gives the Irish five players who earned 2001 preseason all-BIG EAST Conference recognition from the league's coaches (no other school had more than three), with the others including senior shortstop **Alec Porzel** (Lisle, Ill.), junior centerfielder **Steve Stanley** (Upper Arlington, Ohio), junior catcher **Paul O'Toole** (Lakewood, Ohio) and sophomore rightfielder **Brian**



Senior shortstop Alec Porzel ranks as the BIG EAST's top all-around player, with his bat and baserunning ability leaving him on the doorstep of becoming the first Irish player ever to reach 30 home runs and 30 stolen bases in his career.



# SEASON OUTLOOK

**Stavisky** (Port Allegany, Pa.), with Porzel and Stavisky each receiving pre-season BIG EAST player-of-the-year nods from different publications.

Heilman and Stavisky also were tabbed by *Baseball America* as 2001 pre-season first team All-Americans—defending champ LSU was the only other school with multiple players on that list, with one being a transfer student—while Heilman (seventh), Stavisky (17th) and O'Toole (46th) combined to give Notre Dame three players among the top 50 on *BA's* list of college baseball's top prospects (only Georgia Tech had more players in the top 50).

Heilman's return also sets in motion a dramatic shift in the probable starting rotation, with his classmate **Danny Tamayo** likely filling the number-two spot while surging junior **Matt Buchmeier** is slotted as the third starter. Sophomore **J.P. Gagne** could assume a swingman type of role, as a number-four starter and top middle reliever.

"When people look at our situation, they realize we now can throw a battle-tested veteran like Heilman against the other team's ace," says Mainieri.

"But Aaron's return will impact more than just one game a week, because now we have potentially one of the BIG EAST's top number-two starters in Tamayo while having the option of using Gagne's versatility in that swingman type of role. Essentially, Heilman com-

ing back could have some sort of impact on the rotation we use in almost every game that we play."

As if Heilman's return wasn't enough bad news for teams on Notre Dame's 2001 schedule—it clearly helped produce the highest national ranking in the program's history, at ninth in *BA's* pre-season poll—the All-American headed into 2000 fall workouts looking to add another pitch to his already impressive repertoire that includes a low-to-mid-90s sinking fastball, a sharp-breaking slider and an ever-improving changeup.

In fact, *Baseball America* cited Heilman for having the "best true slider" in all of college baseball while listing him as one of three pitchers with the best overall control of his pitches.

**Tamayo**—known for his devastating changeup and ability to set up hitters—returned to form in the 2000 season after undergoing "Tommy John" reconstructive elbow surgery, with his 2000 season including a 3-1 record, 3.62 ERA and a three-hit shutout to beat Mississippi State in the NCAAs. The Miami native's pinpoint control is far and away the best on the Irish staff but he still remains somewhat of an unknown commodity, having logged just 47 innings during his first three seasons.

"Hopefully, Danny gets the chance to go out and show what a quality pitcher he can be," says Mainieri.

"He's just a classic performer who



**Junior Matt Buchmeier (left) and sophomore J.P. Gagne round out a potentially dangerous four-man rotation for the Irish in 2001.**

knows how to pitch. He sets guys up, gets them out and moves on to the next batter."

**Buchmeier** (Greenwood, Ind.) could prove to be one of the "x factors" in Notre Dame's 2001 season, after posting a 4-2 record and 3.88 ERA for the Irish in 2000 before turning in a dominating summer season as a member of the Hays (Kan.) Larks in the Jayhawk League.

"One word is all you need to know when discussing Matt's rise as a pitcher: confidence," says Mainieri.

"He was a little gunshy as a freshman but he's really come on during the past year, and much of that is because he believes strongly in his ability ... of course it helps that he's got pretty good ability to go along with that belief."

Buchmeier's hard-throwing style has improved as he has developed his body, with a key to his 2001 season being consistency with his fastball's velocity.

**Gagne** (Bloomington, Minn.) was one of the more surprisingly effective pitchers in the BIG EAST during the 2000 season, particularly among freshmen (he was named to the BIG EAST all-rookie team).

A classic battler who will be looking for better success versus leadoff batters this season, Gagne was the first Notre Dame pitcher to win his first five decisions in a season since 1996—and the first freshman to do so since 1990 (he finished 7-1, with a 4.46 ERA and 44 strikeouts in 19 appearances, 13 of them starts).

The chief area of concern for the Irish in 2001 is the bullpen, which no longer includes graduated all-time saves leader John Corbin (who also set the season record in 2000 with 11 saves, for 20 in

his career).

In addition to Gagne, top candidates for middle-relief work include sophomore righthanders **Brandon Vloria** (Wailuku, Hawaii) and **Matt Laird** (Bellaire, Texas) and a pair of lefthanders, in senior **Mike Naumann** and freshman **Joe Thaman**.

Laird—a product of the powerhouse Bellaire High School program—enjoyed a decent freshman season in which he won five of his seven decisions while ranking fourth among Irish regulars with a 3.83 ERA.

"Matt last season showed signs of great things to come and the key thing for him is just developing more overall consistency," says Mainieri.

Vloria earned a walk-on roster spot in the fall of 1999 before responding with a 3.18 ERA, 15 strikeouts and just one walk in 17 innings of mostly relief work. "Brandon can give you steady production in that setup role, because he comes out and attacks the hitters by throwing strikes," says Mainieri.

Naumann (Tucson, Ariz.) earned third-team CoSIDA Academic All-America honors for the 2000 season, after doing his part on a staff that ranked 16th in the nation for team ERA (3.93). His 24 relief appearances yielded the second-best ERA on the staff (3.48) and a 2-1 record while his schoolwork has yielded seven Dean's List semesters (three of them 4.0s), a 3.91 cumulative grade-point average as a science pre-professional major and acceptance into several medical schools (with plans to attend Baylor's prestigious medical school).

"A young man like Mike Naumann is a tremendous inspiration, because he has gone out and achieved his dreams



**Senior Danny Tamayo has battled back from "Tommy John" reconstructive elbow surgery to rank as one of the top number-two starters in the BIG EAST.**

◆ Notre Dame's returners accounted for 91 percent of the team's stolen bases in 2000 (69 of 76), plus 76% of the hits (494 of 642), 72% of the RBI (268 of 371) and 84% of the home runs (42 of 50).



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of playing college baseball and then ultimately going to medical school," says Mainieri.

"At the same time, he has played an important role during his career by pitching in some big-game situations and that will make him a valuable veteran in that bullpen this season."

Thaman's everyday role will be as a defensive whiz at first base but he also should see some time on the mound, after gaining some pitching experience at his hometown school, Saint Louis University High School.

"Joe is a player who definitely can contribute for us on the mound. Anytime you have a 6-4 lefthander who has good command of his fastball, you want to get him some innings and see what he can do," says Mainieri.

Top contenders for Corbin's closer role include hard-throwing junior **Drew Duff** (4-2, 5.05 ERA in 2000) and freshman **Aaron Edwards**, a poised newcomer who may have the best curveball on the staff.

Duff is a fiery competitor and one of the team's hardest throwers but will need to prove he can fill the closer's role.

"Drew brings a lot of moxy out to the mound but he needs to show that he can develop better command of his fastball and pitch well when the game

is on the line," says Mainieri.

Edwards was tabbed by *Baseball America* as the BIG EAST Conference's preseason freshman of the year.

"He could very well prove them right, if he keeps improving and maintains the poise that we saw all during fall ball," says Mainieri.

Seven other pitchers round out the Irish relief corps, with that group including senior **Mike Carlin** (Manhattan, Kan.), a pair of inexperienced sophomores and four freshmen.

Sophomore **Peter Ogilvie** (Buffalo Grove, Ill.) remains a promising yet unproven commodity, after missing all of the 2000 season due to an elbow strain. The 6-4, 210-pound righthander was highly touted as a prep due to his size and arm strength.

Walk-on addition **Nick Colagiovanni** (Garfield Heights, Ohio) has been a pleasant surprise due to his competitiveness and ability to throw several pitches consistently for strikes while his classmate **Michael Morgalis** (Cincinnati, Ohio) could emerge as a contributor due to his classic 6-4 "projectable" pitcher's body.

Sophomore **Ryan Kalita** (Oak Park, Ill.) has shown progress since following in the footsteps of his brother Tim (a lefthander picked in the 1999 draft) while a pair of freshmen-righthander **Brian Kaplan** (Ormand Beach, Fla.) and lefty **Cody Wilkins** (Hudson, N.C.)—could see some innings as they continue adjusting to the college game.

The probable starting position players include seven veterans and a pair of freshmen, in second baseman **Steve Sollmann** (Cincinnati, Ohio)—the brother of former Irish all-star outfielder Scott Sollmann—and rookie first baseman **Thamann**.

**Porzel** is the team's veteran leader and has posted team-best RBI totals in each of the past two seasons (58 in 2000, plus a .342 batting average and nine home runs). Billed by Mainieri as the BIG EAST's most underrated player prior to 2000, Porzel went on to earn second-team all-BIG EAST shortstop honors as a junior (behind player-of-the-year Darren

Fenster of Rutgers). And at least one group of outside observers expects more, as *Collegiate Baseball* magazine tabbed Porzel as its preseason BIG EAST player of the year for 2001.

"It's Alec's time to step forward and get the credit he deserves for a great career as a four-year starter at Notre Dame," says Mainieri.

"The most impressive thing about his previous three seasons is Alec's ability to consistently perform in the clutch and he'll fill the same role this year, by likely batting again in the number-three hole."

A trio of lefthanded-hitting juniors—third baseman **Andrew Bushey**, O'Toole and Stanley—forms the core of the Irish squad while embarking on their third season as everyday starters.

**Bushey** (Boardman, Ohio) was a mainstay at the hot corner in 2000—starting 62 of 64 games while batting .275 with three home runs and 30 RBI—and has been billed by *Baseball America* as the BIG EAST's best defensive third baseman.

A classic throwback player on the defensive side and a potentially-potent contact hitter, Bushey also has quickly taken to his new secondary position of catcher—to the point of being the top backup for his classmate O'Toole.

"Andy is due for a breakout year so that he can show what a great hitter he really is," says Mainieri of Bushey, who will join Heilman and Porzel as captains of the 2001 squad.

"Fans also will be impressed with how Bushey has adjusted behind the plate. His agility and quick hands make him a natural for catcher ... but his first home still will be at third."

On the other side of the diamond, the first-year defensive duo of Sollmann and Thamann is expected to comprise a formidable right side of the infield due to their all-around athleticism.

"Those two players are such tremendous all-around athletes and they certainly have the ability to keep a lot of balls from leaving the right side of the infield. Plays like that often can make the difference in whether you win or lose ballgames," says Mainieri.

**Sollmann**—who was named the Cincinnati tri-state male athlete of the year



Third-year starting catcher Paul O'Toole is the hard-nosed leader of the Irish infield and also has made a name for himself as a proven late-season performer.

for 1999-2000—has made a seamless transition from the outfield (where he played for most of his prep days) to the middle infield, effectively reversing a trend from earlier Mainieri-coached teams, in which several shortstops were recruited and then converted into outfielders.

"Steve Sollmann looks like he's been playing second base all his life but since he's such a great athlete, it's not that big of a surprise," says Mainieri, who tried a variety of second basemen during the 2000 season, including current Notre Dame law student Jeff Perconte (whose final season was hampered due to injury).

"Steve also is a very solid all-around batter and we'll look at him in the number-nine spot, in order to give us a second leadoff-type hitter who can get things back to the top of the order. He could be the catalyst to some high-scoring innings for us."

**Thamann** continues a string of defensively-talented Notre Dame first basemen that included recent graduates Dan Leatherman ('98) and Jeff Felker ('00).

"If you want to see a clinic on how to play first base, then come out and watch Joe Thamann field that position," says Mainieri.

"It will be interesting to see how Joe adjusts at the plate but he has bulked up since arriving and really can hit the ball hard. I think he'll be fine offensively after getting some college expe-



Junior Andrew Bushey was tabbed by *Baseball America* as the BIG EAST's best defensive third baseman and could be due for a breakthrough season at the plate.

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rience under his belt.”

**O'Toole** (Lakewood, Ohio) remains the emotional leader of the Notre Dame infield and is coming off a solid season (.302, 8 HRs, 39 RBI) that saw him earn selection to an NCAA All-Regional team for the second straight year, after making plays all over the field at Mississippi State—ranging from a booming home run to throwing out a pair of attempted basestealers.

“Paul has made himself into quite a player during the past year—becoming stronger and hitting the ball with more authority—and that’s a special commodity anytime you have a lefthanded-hitting catcher who can get it done,” says Mainieri of O’Toole, whose all-star performance in the summer Cape Cod League helped elevate his status as a pro prospect.

Senior utility player **Ben Cooke** (Bay Village, Ohio) likely will be Notre Dame’s top reserve at second base, shortstop and third, while also being inserted as a late-inning outfielder and pinch runner. Freshman **Javier Sanchez** (Miami, Fla.) likewise should see some time at third base, particularly when Bushey slides behind the plate.

A pair of hard-hitters—6-5, 230-pound junior **Matt Strickroth** (Mission Viejo, Calif.) and 6-7, 225-pound sophomore **Mike Holba** (Lansing, Ill.)—likely will be among the top backups at first base while freshman walk-on **Zach Sisko** (Belleville, Ill.) provides depth in the Irish infield, where he is reunited with

his prep teammate **Thamann**.

Another freshman walk-on, **Soran Leahy** (Buffalo Grove, Ill.), showed promise during 2000 fall drills and was converted from a shortstop into a reserve catcher.

**Stanley**—one of eight Ohio natives on the squad—again should bat second in the lineup, after leading the 2000 Irish in batting average (.362), stolen bases (29) and runs scored (51). The speedster then led the prestigious Cape Cod wooden-bat summer league with a .329 batting average (plus 20 SBs) and was one of three Irish players—joined by O’Toole and Stavisky—named starters for the Cape Cod League All-Star Game.

“It’s hard to think of what this team would be like without Steve Stanley, because his presence alters so many things that both teams do,” explains Mainieri.

“At the plate, he keeps teams off-balance because of his ability to beat out a bunt or convert a traditional single. And then, when he’s on the bases, it helps the guys hitting behind him because he becomes such a threat to pick up an extra base or two. He even affects things in the way he tracks down balls in center field, because that allows our pitchers to be a little more aggressive and go at the hitters.”

**Stavisky** raised more than a few eyebrows in the Cape Cod League by finishing second (behind Stanley) on the league’s batting charts, at .324 (with two home runs and 26 RBI). The 6-3, 230-

pound lefthanded-hitter actually hit for a higher average with a wooden bat than he did during his freshman season with the Irish (.298), when his 14 home runs (with aluminum bats) ranked fourth among the nation’s freshmen.

But the pride of Port Allegany, Pa.—cited by both *Baseball America* and the BIG EAST coaches as the league’s preseason player of the year—is anything but a simple heavy hitter, as he legged out five triples in 2000 while showing the ability of a potent all-around offensive force.

“We’re going to move Stavisky into the cleanup spot and it could be a lot of fun watching him in that position,” says Mainieri.

“Brian can use the entire field and can drive the ball with such authority. He will have to be an important RBI producer for us this season and could end up having a huge year.”

Sophomore leftfielder **Kris Billmaier** (.354, 4 HR, 19 RBI in 2000) is the other likely outfield starter, after securing a place on the NCAA Starkille Regional all-tournament team (8-for-15, 4 RBI). The



**Junior DH Ken Meyer again will look to spark the Irish offense with his extra-base power from the leadoff spot.**

Woodinville, Wash., natives’ hard-hitting style and improving defense could keep him in the lineup on a regular basis, likely batting behind Stavisky and O’Toole in a key RBI position (sixth).

Switch-hitting junior **Matt Bok** (Akron, Ohio) likewise should see some time in left field and joins classmate **Ken Meyer** (Fort Myers, Fla.) as the squad’s leading designated hitter candidates.

Meyer held down the DH spot for most of 2000 (.326, 3 HR, 20 RBI) while filling Mainieri’s desire for a leadoff hitter with extra-base power (nearly half of his hits took him past first base, including 13 doubles and five triples).

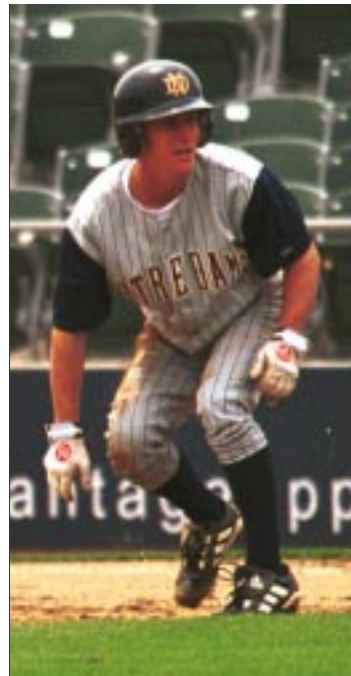
Bok, who transferred to Notre Dame from Georgetown prior to the fall of 1999 semester, batted .259 with 14 RBI in 2000—including RBI hits on both sides of the plate to spark the Irish past Tulane in an elimination game at the Starkville Regional.

Junior walk-on **John Heintz** (Tucson, Ariz.) rounds out the Irish roster, as a reserve outfielder for 2001.

“The bar is set very high for this team and I’m not afraid to say that,” concludes Mainieri, whose first six Irish squads have extended the program’s string of consecutive seasons with 40-plus wins to 12 (the nation’s fourth-longest active streak).

“We have talent on this team but more importantly we have tremendous competitors with a lot of pride. When you have tough kids with pride like that, you don’t put limits on what they can accomplish.”

That’s when you just let the experi-



**(from left) Sophomore leftfielder Kris Billmaier, junior centerfielder Steve Stanley and sophomore rightfielder Brian Stavisky form a talented offensive trio—with Stavisky receiving preseason billing as the 2001 BIG EAST player of the year while Stanley was tabbed as the league’s fastest runner and best defensive outfielder.**

◆ Notre Dame’s probable opening-day batting lineup would include junior DH Ken Meyer at leadoff, followed by CF Steve Stanley, SS Alec Porzel, RF Brian Stavisky, C Paul O’Toole and LF Kris Billmaier.