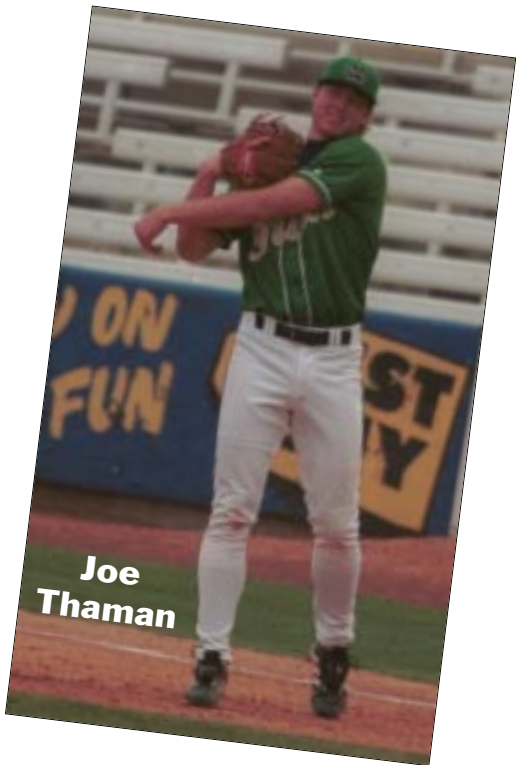


**BIG EAST Baseball Doubleheader**  
**Rutgers Scarlet Knights (28-16, 13-7)**  
**VS.**  
**Notre Dame Fighting Irish (32-12, 11-6)**  
**Saturday, May 4, 2002 ... Eck Stadium (Notre Dame, Indiana)**



**Brian Stavisky**



**Joe Thaman**



**Bobby Brownlie**

## BIG EAST LEADERS

### Overall Batting Average

1. Steve Stanley, ND ..... 460

(4) Brian Stavisky, ND ..... 402

### BIG EAST Batting Average

1. Drew Locke, BC ..... 479

2. Steve Stanley, ND ..... 458

5. Steve Sollmann, ND .... 409

7. Paul O'Toole, ND ..... 403

### Overall Home Runs

1. Brad Rea, Pitt ..... 13

Rob Caffiero, Vill. .... 13

6. Jeff Frazier, RU ..... 10

7. Paul O'Toole, ND ..... 9

### BIG EAST Home Runs

1. Brendan Mannix, Vill. .... 7

2. Paul O'Toole, ND ..... 6

7. Jeff Frazier, RU ..... 4

### Overall RBI

1. Brian Macchi, BC ..... 53

7. Jeff Frazier, RU ..... 42

### BIG EAST RBI

1. Brendan Mannix, Vill. .... 26

3. Paul O'Toole, ND ..... 24

### Overall Triples

1. Paul O'Toole, ND ..... 4

Val Majewski, RU ..... 4

5. Brian Stavisky, ND ..... 3

### Overall Doubles

1. Brian Macchi, BC ..... 21

8. Andrew Bushey, ND ..... 13

### Overall Slugging Percentage

1. Brant Colamarino, Pitt . 776

(4) Brian Stavisky, ND ..... 701

6. Jeff Frazier, RU ..... 600

### Overall On-Base Percentage

1. Steve Stanley, ND ..... 527

### Overall Stolen Bases

1. Chris Graziano, Vill. .... 35

2. Steve Stanley, ND ..... 28

### Overall Walks

1. C. Bilezikjian, SJU ..... 37

4. Chris Badger, RU ..... 30

### Overall Runs Scored

1. Jon Gorrie, UConn ..... 51

2. Steve Stanley, ND ..... 47

### Overall ERA

1. Bobby Brownlie, RU .... 2.14

3. J.P. Gagne, ND ..... 2.29

(4) Peter Ogilvie, ND ..... 2.98

8. John Axford, ND ..... 3.16

### BIG EAST ERA

1. Joe Saunders, VT ..... 0.91

2. Peter Ogilvie, ND ..... 1.83

4. Bobby Brownlie, RU .... 2.35

6. Tom Crohan, RU ..... 2.80

10. Tom Wheeler, RU ..... 3.40

### Overall Opp. Batting Average

1. Chris Lambert, BC ..... 181

4. J.P. Gagne, ND ..... 218

6. John Axford, ND ..... 234

8. Tom Wheeler, RU ..... 237

9. Bobby Brownlie, RU .... 239

### BIG EAST Opp. Batting Average

1. Tom Wheeler, RU ..... 189

5. John Axford, ND ..... 224

6. Tom Crohan, RU ..... 225

### Overall Wins

3. Tom Wheeler, RU ..... 7-2

4. Bobby Brownlie, RU ..... 6-3

J.P. Gagne, ND ..... 6-3

### Overall Strikeouts

1. Mark Sullivan, BC ..... 79

7. Bobby Brownlie, RU ..... 60

### Overall Saves

2. Ryan Molchan, RU ..... 9

## Updated BIG EAST Conference Baseball Standings

1. Rutgers	13-7	28-16
Boston College	13-7	24-18
<b>3. Notre Dame</b>	<b>11-6</b>	<b>32-12</b>
Virginia Tech	11-6	23-21
5. Connecticut	12-7	26-17
6. St. John's	10-10	23-20
7. Villanova	9-10	27-19
8. Pittsburgh	8-9	27-13-1
Seton Hall	8-9	22-21
10. West Virginia	6-11	21-20
11. Georgetown	2-21	9-44

### This Weekend's BIG EAST Series (byes for BC, SJU, Vill.)

UConn at Virginia Tech ... G'town at Pittsburgh ... Seton Hall at West Virginia

### Last Week's BIG EAST Games

Connecticut swept Georgetown (15-1, 15-7, 12-1)

Boston College won 2-of-3 from from St. John's (3-4, 2-8, 8-6/10)

Pittsburgh won 2-of-3 from Villanova (8-4, 2-8, 5-1)

Rutgers swept West Virginia (6-2, 7-2, 5-4)

### Remaining Games For Top Teams

ND: @Villanova, vs. BC ... BC: vs. Virginia Tech, @ND ...

Va. Tech: @BC, vs. WVU ... Rutgers: bye, @SJU ... UConn: bye, @Pittsburgh

**THE BIG EAST RACE** – Four teams sit in a virtual tie atop the standings, with the teams owning the top-four winning percentages after the 26-game schedule earning the right to advance to the BIG EAST Tournament (Monday's are a mandatory makeup day for three-game series, excluding the final weekend) ... ND owns the head-to-head tiebreaker vs. Virginia Tech (UConn has ND on the tiebreaker, but the Huskies lost a game vs. Villanova due to rain).

**IRISH NOTES** (also see feature story on Steve Stanley) – Notre Dame is riding a 14-game winning streak (2nd-longest in the eight-year Paul Mainieri era and 6th-longest in the program's 110-year history), after wins this week over Michigan (7-4) and Oakland (11-5) ... ND has totaled 16 more runs (80) than runners stranded (64) during the last nine games ... the Irish are batting .333 in the 14-game winning streak, led by Steve Stanley (.481), Brian Stavisky (.400), Kris Billmaier and Steve Sollmann (both .383) and Matt Bok (.375) ... ND (currently 8th in the nation for team ERA) has joined Rice and Texas as the only teams currently in the top 20 for team ERA who also finished among the final top-20 ERA leaders in both 2000 and '01 (ND was 16th and 5th) ... the Irish have returned to the national polls (as high as 19th, according to *Collegiate Baseball* magazine) ... ND is 13-2-1 in its last 16 games that have extended to extra innings (including the recent 2-1, 11-inning win over Virginia Tech) ... the Irish have won 82% of their games in April during the Mainieri era, including 20-2 in 2001 and 19-2 last month ... 3B Andrew Bushey (0) and SS Javier Sanchez (2) have made just two errors between them in the last 11 games, with Sanchez posting 31 error-free games in his first season ever at SS (following the season-ending injuries to freshmen Matt Macri and Matt Edwards) while Bushey has gone 22 games since his last error (35 error-free games in '02) ... 2B Steve Sollmann also has a low error total (5), including just one E in his last 17 games ... J.P. Gagne entered the week ranked 39th in the nation for ERA (now down to 2.29), with his last seven relief outings including a 4-0 record, two saves and an 0.40 ERA, plus 18 Ks, just 4 walks and 13 hits allowed in that 22.2-inning span ... Kris Billmaier is batting 8-for-15 in the last five games ... Bushey's 48 doubles ties him with Joe Binkiewicz ('92) for 9th on the ND all-time list, just two back of another '92 grad. (Craig Counsell) and Irish career home run leader Jeff Wagner ('96-'99) ... ND owns a 41-8 scoring edge in the 5th ... Paul O'Toole (51 SBs) needs one more HR to join Porzel (32 SBs) as the only ND players ever to reach 30 HRs and 30 SBs ... the recent 10-1 win over Ball State saw Bushey hit his first career grand slam (at any level), with O'Toole then hitting grand slams in the next two games (vs. Toledo, Seton Hall) ... Stavisky returned April 9, after missing nine games with a facial fracture (ND is 15-1 since his return) ... that marked just the third game in the first 28 that pre-season All-Americans Stavisky, Stanley and Sollmann started the same game ... O'Toole (29/10) recently joined Stavisky (29/12), Alec Porzel (37/12, '98-'01) and Ryan Topham (34/13, '93-'95) as the only ND players ever to record 25-plus home runs and 10-plus triples ... freshman RHP Chris Niesel – a top starter in the rotation – is sidelined indefinitely with mononucleosis (last outing April 7) ...

## THE TALE OF THE TAPE

	RUTGERS		NOTRE DAME	
2001 Records	42-17, 18-8		49-13, 22-4	
Lettermen Returning/Lost	17/7		16/5	
<b>CURRENT STATS</b>	BIG EAST Rank		BIG EAST Rank	
Overall Batting Average	(7)	.298	(3)	<b>.314</b>
BIG EAST Batting Average	(9)	.277	(2)	<b>.324</b>
Runs Per 9 Innings		6.5		<b>7.0</b>
Home Runs		<b>35</b>		31
Slugging Percentage		.433		<b>.451</b>
Batters BB/K Ratio		0.61		<b>0.77</b>
On-Base Percentage		.374		<b>.393</b>
Stolen Bases		42		<b>47</b>
Stolen Base Percentage		.712		<b>.723</b>
Overall Team ERA	(2)	3.92	(1)	<b>3.38</b>
BIG EAST ERA	(1)	<b>3.45</b>	(2)	3.47
Pitchers' K-to-BB Ratio		1.99		<b>2.22</b>
Pitchers' Ks Per 9 Innings		6.9		<b>7.6</b>
Opponent Batting Average		.265		<b>.256</b>
Fielding Pct./Errors	(1)	<b>.965/57</b>	(5)	.958/69
Double Plays Turned		<b>55</b>		39
Record In One-Run Games		7-5		7-5
Extra-Inning Record		0-0		4-1



## 2002 NOTRE DAME FIGHTING IRISH

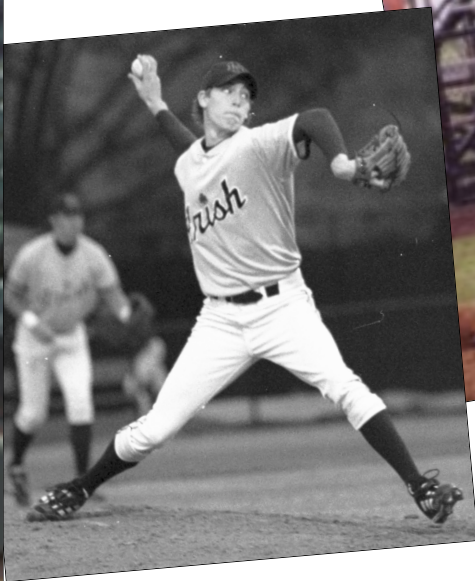
<u>NO</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>CL</u>	<u>POS</u>	<u>HT/WT</u>	<u>HOMETOWN (PREVIOUS SCHOOL)</u>
2	*Steve Stanley (C)	Sr.	CF	5-8/155	Upper Arlington, OH (Worthington Christian HS)
3	Steve Sollmann	So.	2B	5-10/190	Cincinnati, OH (St. Xavier HS)
5	Drew Duff	Sr.	RHP	5-11/190	Sevierville, TN (Sevier County HS)
6	*Geoff Milsom	Fr.	IF	6-1/195	New York, NY (Poly Prep HS)
7	*Zach Sisko	So.	IF	6-1/195	Belleville, IL (St. Louis University HS)
8	Kris Billmaier	Jr.	RF	5-10/200	Woodinville, WA (Woodinville HS)
9	#Matt Bok	Sr.	DH/OF	5-10/190	Akron, OH (Georgetown University/Walsh Jesuit HS)
10	Chris Niesel	Fr.	RHP	5-11/205	Plantation, FL (St. Thomas Aquinas HS)
11	Matt Macri	Fr.	SS/RHP	6-1/185	Clive, IA (Dowling HS)
12	*Andrew Bushey (C)	Sr.	3B/C	5-10/190	Boardman, OH (Cardinal Mooney HS)
13	Jay Molina	Fr.	C	5-11/195	Moline, IL (Moline HS)
14	Matt Edwards	Fr.	IF/OF	6-1/180	Mechanicsville, VA (Lee-Davis HS)
15	Javier Sanchez	So.	IF	6-2/200	Miami, FL (Christopher Columbus HS)
17	Ken Meyer	Sr.	DH/1B	6-0/205	Fort Myers, FL (Bishop Verot HS)
18	Brent Weiss	Fr.	OF/C	6-1/215	Cockeysville, MD (St. Paul's HS)
19	*Brian Stavisky	Jr.	LF	6-3/220	Port Allegany, PA (Port Allegany HS)
20	Peter Ogilvie	Jr.	RHP	6-3/215	Buffalo Grove, IL (Stevenson HS)
21	*Joe Thaman	So.	1B/LHP	6-4/210	St. Louis, MO (St. Louis University HS)
22	Grant Johnson	Fr.	RHP	6-6/220	Burr Ridge, IL (Lyons Township HS)
23	Martin Vergara	Fr.	RHP	6-0/185	Paterson, NJ (DePaul Catholic HS)
25	Mike Holba	Jr.	1B	6-8/240	Lansing, IL (Thornton Fractional South HS)
27	*Paul O'Toole	Sr.	C/3B	6-2/205	Lakewood, OH (St. Ignatius HS)
29	Cody Wilkins	So.	LHP	6-1/225	Hudson, NC (South Caldwell HS)
30	Mike Morgalis	So.	RHP	6-4/205	Cincinnati, OH (Sycamore HS)
32	Ryan Kalita	Jr.	RHP	6-2/210	Oak Park, IL (Oak Park River Forest HS)
33	Scott Bickford	Fr.	LHP	6-4/160	Owings, MD (Northern HS)
35	Matt Strickroth	Sr.	OF/1B	6-4/230	Mission Viejo, CA (Santa Margarita HS)
37	Matt Laird	Jr.	RHP	6-0/195	Bellaire, TX (Bellaire HS)
38	Tyler Jones	Fr.	RHP	6-4/205	Arlington, TX (James Martin HS)
39	Matt Buchmeier	Sr.	RHP	6-0/190	Greenwood, IN (Roncalli HS)
40	George Howard	Fr.	OF	5-7/145	Pine Bluff, AR (Pine Bluff)
44	Mike Milligan	Fr.	C	5-10/240	Oklahoma City, OK (Bishop McGuinness)
45	Brandon Vioria	Jr.	RHP	5-11/210	Wailuku, HI (Maui HS)
46	J.P. Gagne	Jr.	RHP	6-0/200	Bloomington, MN (Cretin-Derham Hall HS)
49	John Axford	Fr.	RHP	6-5/175	Port Dover, Ontario (Assumption College HS)

(C) – captains \* – lefthanded hitter; # – switch hitter

**Head Coach:** # 1 Paul Mainieri (St. Thomas '82, eighth season at Notre Dame)

**Assistant Coaches:** # 26 Brian O'Connor (Creighton '93), # 4 Dusty Lepper (Toledo '96)

**Volunteer Assistant:** #28 Wally Widelski (Notre Dame '97)



*(from left) Grant Johnson, John Axford  
and Steve Sollmann*

## 2002 RUTGERS SCARLET KNIGHTS

NO	NAME	CL	POS	HT/WT	HOMETOWN/PREVIOUS SCHOOL
1	Tom Crohan	Sr.	LHP	6-1/200	Jersey City, NJ/St. Peter's Prep
2	*Vinny Esposito	Jr.	OF	6-0/195	Middletown, NJ/Middletown North HS
4	David Santiago	Sr.	R	6-0/190	Parlin, NJ/Sayreville HS
5	Jason Grover	Fr.	IF	5-10/175	Montgomery, NJ/Montgomery HS
6	Alberto Vasquez	Jr.	C	5-10/180	Jersey City, NJ/Hudson Catholic HS
7	Cory Rodriguez	Fr.	IF	6-0/180	Bridgewater, NJ/Bridgewater-Raritan HS
9	Jack Egbert	Fr.	RHP	6-3/200	Rutherford, NJ/Rutherford HS
11	*Jamell Rosario	So.	OF	6-0/185	Vineland, NJ/St. Augustine Prep
13	Jeff Pierce	Sr.	RHP	6-5/220	Brick, NJ/Brick Memorial HS
14	Leon Shade	Sr.	OF	6-1/190	Montclair, NJ/Montclair-Kimberly HS
15	Ryan Lillis	Sr.	3B	6-1/200	Fair Haven, NJ/Christian Brothers Academy
16	Bobby Brownlie	Jr.	RHP	6-1/210	Edison, NJ/Edison HS
17	Tom Malafrente	So.	RHP	6-5/220	Somerville, NJ/Somerville HS
19	Dave Caffrey	So.	RHP	6-4/190	Basking Ridge, NJ/Delbarton HS
21	Tim Sweeney	Jr.	SS	6-3/195	Sparta, NJ/Pope John HS
22	Ryan Molchan	Sr.	LHP	6-5/210	East Brunswick, NJ/East Brunswick HS
23	*Val Majewski	Jr.	1B/OF	6-2/200	Freehold, NJ/Freehold HS
26	Nick Cerulo	Jr.	OF	6-1/195	Woodbridge, NJ/St. Joseph's HS
27	Jason Bergmann	Jr.	RHP	6-4/185	Manalapan, NJ/Manalapan HS
28	Matt Wolski	Sr.	2B	5-10/180	Hamilton, NJ/Steinert HS
31	Lee Moskowitz	So.	C	6-2/200	Edison, NJ/Edison HS
32	*Kevin Flynn	So.	LHP	6-4/200	Cedar Grove, NJ/Cedar Grove HS
33	Mike Popowski	Sr.	C	6-0/230	Sayreville, NJ/Sayreville HS
34	Rich Canuso	So.	1B/DH	6-3/215	Monroe, NJ/Notre Dame HS
35	Jeff Frazier	Fr.	OF	6-3/180	Toms River, NJ/Toms River South HS
37	Steve Normane	Sr.	1B	6-2/210	West Orange, NJ/Livingston HS
38	Graig Badger	So.	2B	5-9/170	Union, NJ/Union HS
41	*Sean Atchison	Jr.	LHP	6-1/200	Florham Park, NJ/Hanover Park HS
42	Brian Winters	Sr.	RHP	6-1/205	Brick, NJ/Brick Memorial HS
46	Tom Wheeler	Sr.	RHP	6-3/205	Beachwood, NJ/Toms River South HS
47	Aaron Kalb	Fr.	RHP	6-0/180	Middletown, NJ/Middletown North HS

\* – lefthanded hitter; # – switch hitter **Head Coach:** Fred Hill **Assistants:** Glen Gardner, Tom Baxter, Jay Blackwell

**THE SERIES:** ND holds a 10-7 series edge in its growing rivalry with Rutgers and the Irish have won the last six meetings, including an 8-2, 5-4, 6-2 (in 11) sweep at RU last season (the first time that the Knights had been swept at home in a three-game BIG EAST series) and a 6-2 win in a 2001 BIG EAST Tournament elimination game ... Aaron Heilman tossed a 3-hitter in the opener of last year's series at RU (6 Ks, 10 groundouts) while J.P. Gagne (6 IP, 2 R, 5 H, 2 BB, 4 Ks) won Game 2 after flipping spots with Danny Tamayo ... ND rallied for six runs in the 6th inning of the opener, with Kris Billmaier providing the key two-run single ... Andrew Bushey's bases-loaded double then ignited ND's five-run 1st inning in the nightcap ... RU's Bobby Brownlie did not pitch due to injury, with Buddy Gallagher (5.2 IP, 9 H, 9 R/8 ER, BB, K) and Tom Wheeler (6.1 IP, 6 H, 8 R/7 ER, 5 BB, 3 K) taking the losses ... Steve Sollmann's 2-run blast vs. reliever Eric Brown capped the quick turnaround in the first game ... the 2001 series finale held more drama, as the Irish scored three times in the 9th to force extra innings before Matt Laird worked out of a bases-loaded jam in the 10th to set up the 11th-inning win ... Tamayo tossed seven solid innings (8 H, 3 R, 3 BB, 4 K) but had no run support while Laird logged the final three innings for the win (H, BB, 3 K) ... Brian Stavisky's 9th-inning hit vs. lefthander Ryan Molchan kept the Irish alive while Paul O'Toole tied the game with a two-out single ... Billmaier's single then scored Sollmann all the way from first base for the go-ahead run in the 11th ... Tom Crohan (7 IP, 3 H, R, 2 BB, 3 K) had a strong start for RU, with Molchan (2.2 IP, 5 H, 2 R) taking the loss ... Heilman was dominant in the 2001 BIG EAST Tournament win over RU (9 IP, 6 H, BB, 12 Ks) while Stavisky, Alec Porzel and Matt Strickroth all homered for ND (Gallagher took the loss after allowing 11 hits and six runs in 7 IP).

## Probable Pitching Matchups



**Tom Crohan**

**Bobby Brownlie (Jr., RHP)**  
(2.14, 6-3, 63.0 IP, 60 K/13 BB, .239)

vs.

**John Axford (Fr., RHP)**  
(3.16, 4-2, 51.1 IP, 46 K/34 BB, .234)

**Tom Crohan (Sr., LHP)**  
(3.84, 5-3, 58.2 IP, 51 K/40 BB, .241)

vs.

**Grant Johnson (Fr., RHP)**  
(3.70, 4-4, 56.0 IP, 53 K/25 BB, .254)

*Sunday: Wheeler vs. Ogilvie*

**NOTES:** Bobby Brownlie was rated by *Baseball America* as the nation's top draft prospect and was one of the top pitchers for Team USA last summer ... RU opened 0-5 in the BIG EAST (2-8, 4-8, 6-9 vs. BC; 1-2, 8-17 at Va. Tech) before sweeping Villanova (2-0) and Georgetown (3-0), splitting two vs. SHU, taking two from UConn, a 2-1 series with Pittsburgh and a 3-game sweep of WVU ... 2B Matt Wolski is out for the season with an injury ... RU won a '96 series at ND (4-2, 3-5, 10-7) but the teams were rained in '98 ... the 2000 showdown came in the final week with the BIG EAST title on the line, as RU clinched with a 16-6 win in the opener before ND took the series (5-4, 6-2), with Brian Stavisky hitting a 2-run, game-ending blast in the second game ... ND's Paul O'Toole is a .321 career hitter vs. RU (2 HR) while Steve Stanley has hit just .286 vs. the Knights (.382 overall in his career) ... J.P. Gagne owns a 2-0 record and 1.80 ERA in two career starts vs. RU (10 IP, 5 H, 2 R, 3 BB, 5 Ks).

# Stanley Standing Tall In Final Season

By Pete LaFleur

Steve Stanley didn't think he ever was going to get at a hit on the Division I level, not after enduring an 0-for-17 start to his college career.

More than 200 games later, a player often overlooked due to his size (5-8, 155) is standing tall as one of the nation's premier players, while rewriting the Notre Dame and BIG EAST record books.

Stanley's career is all the more noteworthy when considering the journey, including the first five games that saw him reach base just twice (on walks), with no stolen-base attempts, one run scored and six strikeouts.

In the next game versus the University of New Orleans, Stanley followed Alec Pore's leadoff triple with a sacrifice fly for his second RBI of the season. One inning later, his long-awaited single helped put six runs on the board for a 10-1 lead – en route to a 14-11 win.

With a runner on third and one out, Stanley worked to a 3-0 edge in the count. Surprisingly, head coach Paul Mainieri gave his struggling rookie the "green light."

"The time was right to build Steve's confidence and that only was going to happen if he got a hit in a clutch situation," remembers Mainieri.

Stanley didn't let the opportunity slip away, drilling the next pitch over the second baseman's head, motoring to second when the rightfielder fumbled with the ball and adding his first stolen base for good measure.

Some 900 at-bats later, Stanley's career hit total (346) is within range of the all-time leaders in the Division I history and his .382 career batting average ranks third in the Notre Dame record book.

"I really had questioned whether I had the ability to play on the Division I level," says Stanley. "All of the freshmen were kind of shellshocked and we didn't know if we'd be able to be a good team.

"That's why I'm so grateful that coach Mainieri gave me the chance to get that hit. It really put me back on track and I started believing in myself."

Mainieri had encouraged Stanley not to set personal goals prior to his first season. "He said I could hit .150 and still be in the lineup because of my defense," recalls Stanley. "But later he joked that he didn't really mean it and it would be OK for me to start getting some hits. It was a good time to laugh about it, but I still had my doubts."

Stanley's worst hitting "slumps" since that ominous start were a pair of three-game hitless slides in that '99 season. The rest of his career – including all of the 2000-02 seasons – has yet to see the consummate battler go more than two consecutive games without a hit.

An accomplished bunter early in his career, a stronger Stanley now can just as easily drive the ball into the gaps while still hitting effectively to all fields and in all situations. His presence on the basepaths provides a pesky distraction to opposing pitchers – and an altered pitch selection for the hitters – while Stanley's textbook defense regularly takes hits off the board for baffled opponents.

"Show me a player who does more things for his team on a consistently high level and I'll be the first one to shake that young man's hand," says Mainieri.

"I don't think you will find that player because there is only one Steve Stanley. He has a lot of great attributes but his heart may be the most important, because there are a lot of players with

great talent that never come close to making the impact that he has made."

*Baseball America's* midseason report ranked Stanley as the nation's "best player under 5-10" while also dubbing him the "Roy Jones of college baseball" (i.e. best "pound-for-pound").

The size issue always has been a battle for Stanley and will continue to be as he attempts to play at the professional level. "I've always been challenged by people because of my size," he says. "And I've always proved them wrong."

By starting both games today, Stanley would run his string of consecutive starts to 234 – second-longest in Division I history and the best in 15 years, since Arizona's Chip Hale started all 255 from 1984-87. Stanley also needs 20 more hits to earn a top-five spot on the Division I all-time list.

Just one year removed from the end of the most-decorated career in Notre Dame baseball history, Stanley has matched the type of numbers posted by righthanded pitcher Aaron Heilman. While Heilman went 43-7 record and blew away the team record for career strikeouts (425, well ahead of the 315 by David Sinnes), Stanley's 346 career hits already are 50 better than the previous Irish record (296, by Pat Pesavento).

Stanley also has bested Pesavento's record for consecutive starts (204) while his 225 runs rank second, 21 shy of Pesavento's record. Stanley's 906 ABs have knocked Alec Porzel (860) from the top of that ND list, with Porzel's records for games played (239) and started (238) likewise within Stanley's sights. He also ranks as Notre Dame's all-time leader in stolen bases (112) and has totaled nearly twice as many walks (113, eighth in ND history) as strikeouts (60).

No player in the history of the BIG EAST Conference has totaled more hits (141) or scored more runs (98) in BIG EAST regular-season games than Stanley, who recently bested the old records held by former Rutgers teammates Darren Fenster (138 hits) and David DeJesus (93 runs).

Stanley has fashioned a final season that serves as a perfect cap to his four years with the Irish.

He entered the week ranked sixth in the nation for batting average (.467) and has walked 25 times for a .527 on-base percentage. Both are on pace to challenge ND records held by 1993 senior outfielders Edwin Hartwell (.447 batting) and Eric Danapiliis (.531 on-base). Stanley has posted three double-digit hitting streaks in 2002 while going hitless in just five of 44 games.

"I have a lot more confidence and a lot of that comes from coach Mainieri letting me play my game," says Stanley. "I've become a better all-around hitter, I'm stronger and am hitting the gaps more, and I just have more focus and am really putting the bat on the ball. I've been more aggressive early in the count and have never seen the ball as well as I am now."

It's a true testament to a player's lofty status when even failure produces great statistical notes. Such was the case on Tuesday vs. Michigan, as Stanley posted just the third 0-for-5 game of his career (first in 195 games) and had multiple strikeouts (2) for the first time in 95 games.

His longest "slump" of the season has been six consecutive at-bats without a hit and his amazingly-low total of six strikeouts factors out to 34 plate appearances per K.

One of Stanley's best "friends" in the Notre Dame program is the "Iron Mike" pitching machine,

located in the indoor hitting facility.

"I love having the use of our indoor facility. You can focus on situational batting and get in a groove. There's no question it has played a big role in my improvement as a hitter," says Stanley, whose yearly batting average has jumped 40-60 points every season (.326-.362-.400-.460).

His consistency in the first 11 weeks of the season includes hitting at least .285 in every week (above .475 each of the last five). His average has been well above .400 since the seventh game of the season.

Stanley joined many of the Irish in taking the team's 9-10 start as a personal challenge. And with his teammates falling around him due to an assortment of injuries, Stanley responded by again elevating his game.

"We did not get the job done with the bats and simply didn't hit in the clutch," he says. "We were hit hard by a lot of injuries and had to adjust to not having veteran pitchers like Aaron Heilman and Danny Tamayo, but we still had chances to win games and didn't get it done. That's obviously changed."

With preseason All-American Brian Stavisky lost from the lineup early in the March 28th double-header at West Virginia (he was hit with a pitch and would endure his second nine-game rehab of the season), Notre Dame responded by taking the second game from WWU – launching the Irish onto the current 23-2 run.

Stanley's trademark intensity is nothing new for his classmates, who witnessed it firsthand at a routine intrasquad scrimmage in the fall of '98. Stanley was coaching third base that day when 6-4, 230-pound Matt Strickroth came barreling into the bag and tumbled into his smaller classmate.

"Matt was upset that Steve didn't tell him to slide, and Steve came right back at him by telling Matt that he should have taken responsibility for himself," recalls senior catcher Paul O'Toole, who has known Stanley since their days as 14-year-olds on the Akron-based Mainstreet Muffins summer team.

"You had the biggest and smallest guys on the team about to go at it, but that's how Steve's been ever since I've known him. He wouldn't be the type of player he is without that intensity and competitiveness."

Stanley credits his father, Mike Stanley, with much of his development as a player. Those lessons began when Steve was nine years old, as he quickly picked up the art of outfield defense.

"My dad taught me how to go back on a ball, not backpedaling, and then how to find the wall and find the ball," says Stanley.

The drills often took place at a nearby school, with the high-energy youngster dragging his dad down the street for a lengthy game of catch. Mike Stanley would lob balls to his son, continually preparing him to make the touch catches.

"That was the first time I noticed that Stephen has an abnormally high work ethic, because he never once asked to stop," says the elder Stanley. "My arm would start getting tired, so I'd try to make the throws even harder, but he'd still run them down. Finally, I'd have to be the one to stop."

One of the more subtle aspects of Stanley's effect on the game is the role that his defense plays in determining the approach of his team's pitchers.

"It was great having Steve out there, because you knew you didn't have to throw the perfect pitch



every time," says Heilman, a first-round draft choice of the New York Mets.

"Even if a guy put a good swing on it, he ran it down. He takes away the hard-hit balls to the gaps but also the little bloop hits, because he loves to play shallow. You don't have to worry about jamming a batter and having a hit sail into shallow center, because he's there to catch it."

Notre Dame's 2000 NCAA appearance came at one of the premier venues in all of college baseball, Mississippi State's Dudy Noble Field. Known for its knowledgeable fanbase that numbers well over 10,000, Dudy Noble's most unique attraction is the "Leftfield Lounge" – a seating area that has grown to include the entire outfield viewing space.

The Irish entered this setting as the third seed among four teams, battling through five games before losing on a ninth-inning home run in an epic title game, 10-9, versus the host Bulldogs – with Stanley racing into the wall as he chased the game's final hit, before crumpling to the ground in dismay.

Stanley became the fan favorite of the Leftfield Lounge. And as he trudged back to the dugout, he was comforted by numerous fans who had jumped the centerfield fence to console one of their new college baseball heroes.

"That whole experience in Starkville remains the best I've had in baseball," says Stanley. "We made a lot of believers in Notre Dame baseball and the people there were so classy. They really cared about the other team. That's something I'm going to love showing to my kids some day."

Stanley's .363 batting average during his first three seasons with the Irish included a lofty .434 (23-for-53) in 13 NCAA games. He hit 7-for-19 at the Starkville Regional, but his biggest hit came one year later, at Notre Dame's Eck Stadium.

With his team down to its last out in an elimination game vs. UC Santa Barbara, Stanley drove a 2-1 pitch into center, with O'Toole motoring home from second base as the tying run. Stavisky's 10th-inning home run then capped the 11-10 win.

Stanley was all smiles, yet still all-business, in the postgame press conference. "I live for times like this," he told the media. "I wanted to be that person up there in that situation. When I got the 2-and-1 count, I smiled at the plate because I knew that I was going to do it."

Stanley is the most visible member of an eight-

member senior class that has been a major force in the program's rise. The class made its debut in a rare exhibition vs. Michigan State, at Lansing's Oldsmobile Park in the fall of '98. The game provided a glimpse at the future of the program, with three freshman starters from that game going on to be four-year starters with the Irish.

Those three players – Stanley, O'Toole and third baseman Andrew Bushey – already are the only Notre Dame classmates ever to start 200-plus games (Bushey will start his 200th today). Their eye-popping combined numbers include 787 hits, 136 doubles, 374 RBI and 517 runs scored.

The Irish have won nearly 75 percent of their games in the past four seasons (170-62-1), with the eight seniors combining for 1,207 games played and 932 starts.

"I have great pride in this program and am driven to maintain that level of excellence," says Stanley. "Our first goal still is to make the BIG EAST Tournament and try to win it, but then we want to make another run at Omaha and the College World Series. I hope that never stops being the goal of this program."

Stanley also was an all-star performer in the prestigious Cape Cod wooden-bat league during the summer of 2000. Playing alongside O'Toole as the centerfielder and leadoff hitter for the Brewster Whitecaps, Stanley led his team to the Cape Cod League title while winning the league's batting title (.329) as a summer All-American.

Head coach of that Brewster team, current USC pitching coach Dave Lawn, views Stanley as a serious contender for national player of the year.

"Steve is the best leadoff hitter I've seen on the college level in my 16 years of coaching," says Lawn, who was reunited with Stanley and O'Toole earlier this season in ND's 15-8 win over USC.

"When we played Notre Dame, I knew exactly how to pitch Steve but we still couldn't get him out. If you miss what you're trying to do by even a half an inch, he's going to beat you."

Stanley's batting-title season in the Cape was accompanied by total confidence from his coach. "The amazing thing is that I never had to give Steve a sign all season," says Lawn. "He always knew the situation and knew what he had to do. Having him on your team is like a lesson in Baseball 101."

Lawn also has his own take on Stanley's defensive skills. "Steve's style is to play very shallow to take away the short hits and guys would launch 'S.K.U.D. missiles' that he would just run down. My father-in-law saw said that Steve plays just like Joe DiMaggio used to play, and he saw DiMaggio play in the Pacific Coast League."

Lawn's discussions of Stanley's attributes include a telling anecdote about the player's character. With Brewster's playoff position locked up heading into their final regular-season game, Stanley led teammate Jack Headley atop the Cape batting charts and had the option of sitting out the finale, with no chance of losing the battle title.

"Steve could have sat out and won the batting title anyway," says Lawn. "But he wanted to play, went out and got three 'knocks' and won it the right way."

The depth of Stanley's personality extends well beyond the baseball field. Known for his high-energy attitude and propensity for practical jokes, the Irish co-captain also has a softer side that is based in his spirituality and his recent marriage to high school sweetheart Brooke May.

"I've definitely become more mellow off the field and that's due in large part to being married and to a talk that coach Mainieri and I had before the season," says Stanley. "He told me that I would

have to make some adjustments in order to play at the next level. You would have seen me throw my helmet and yell at umpires a lot more in the past. Now I just let the game come to me, and it's worked out great."

Stanley's closest confidant on the team has been Bushey, with the pair rooming together on every roadtrip of their careers.

"Steve does so many things for this team that you can't put on a stat sheet," says Bushey. "Even the off-field stuff like his energy, the rest of the guys just feed off of it and he's the life of the bus when we are on the road. You'd never know those type of things by watching him play, but he's a very unique teammate who makes an impact on you in so many ways."

Bushey and Stanley have become kindred spirits, capable of analyzing each other's game with striking efficiency.

"We know each other almost as well as we know ourselves, and I always can tell him what he did wrong in a game and he'll tell me the same thing," says Bushey. "It's amazing the things we notice about each other's game and we can be totally open with each other."

Stanley's inner peace is based in his strong spirituality. "My belief in God and his purpose for me gives my life a great sense of perspective," he says. "I'm very devoted to my beliefs and I also know that God has given me a gift. It's my responsibility to share that gift with others by being the best player, teammate and friend that I can be."

The O'Toole family deserves some of the credit for Stanley ending up at the Notre Dame. O'Toole and his father Philip were visiting Notre Dame in the summer of 1997, when the elder O'Toole mentioned to former Irish assistant Cory Mee that he should take a look at a dynamic centerfielder who had played summer-ball with his son.

With the Irish hoping to find a centerfielder on a par with former all-star Scott Sollmann ('94-'96), Mee headed to Lexington, Ky., for a Team One Showcase in which Stanley was likely to play.

"There were five or six games that weekend but I only got to play in one," recalls Stanley. "They had this format where you could be a designated runner and I stole six bases. I think it made an impression on Cory and that basically led to me being recruited by Notre Dame."

Stanley knows that some observers believe he could have played for a lesser program but been more of the marquee player, not having to share the spotlight with the likes of Heilman and Stavisky.

"If I had done that, I would not have come close to being the type of player that I am now," he says.

"And that's mostly due to coach Mainieri, because he truly gets the best out of his players. I can't even imagine what kind of player I would have been at another school.

"I was given the chance to have a total college experience at Notre Dame and wouldn't trade it for the world. I have the best group of teammates you could ever ask for. I've have made so many lifelong friends and all the people here are so genuinely caring. It's a very special place."

With his final collegiate hit just around the corner, Stanley often thinks back to that first hit. Others do as well.

"I can remember how hard it was trying to think of something to say to Steve, after each game when he didn't get a hit," remembers Bushey. "It was such a relief when that first hit fell. I'll never forget him running down the line, pumping his fist in the air like we'd just won the World Series."

Luckily for the Irish program, he hasn't stopped running since.

