

■ Major League Baseball

Reds back, look for deep playoff run

CINCINNATI (AP) — Same starting five in the rotation. Same back end of the bullpen. Same starting lineup, except for one spot.

On the surface, not much has changed with the Cincinnati Reds, and that's exactly how they wanted it. The NL Central division champions have brought their team back virtually intact for another run at their elusive goal.

Another division title is only an initial goal for a team that won 97 games last season. They're looking way beyond that first champagne celebration.

Instead, they've got their eye on late October. "I want to get to the next

round of the playoffs," second baseman Brandon Phillips said. "I want to start there. Of course the goal every year is to win the ring, but I feel like you've got to take steps."

The Reds have taken huge steps in the last five years, reconfiguring themselves from perennial also-ran to consistent playoff contender. They went nine years without so much as a winning record, and 15 years between playoff appearances before winning the division as an up-and-coming team in 2010.

They got swept in the playoffs by the Phillies that season, then slipped the following year under a lot of injuries. They were back on

top last season with a team built for long-term success, but fell in the first round of the playoffs again, this time to the Giants in five games.

Everything about the off-season has gone into giving them a better chance to not only reach the playoffs, but to keep going.

"We're a team that's built for now," general manager Walk Jocketty said. "We're built to win now."

They think some modest lineup tweaking could make them a bit better.

One of their biggest weaknesses for years has been the lack of a leadoff hitter, which forced manager Dusty Baker to use Phillips and others in the top spot. They got Shin-

Soo Choo from the Indians to replace Drew Stubbs, who struck out too much to be effective. Choo could be a short-term fix, with Billy Hamilton — who set a minor league record with 155 steals last season — playing center field and batting leadoff for Triple-A Louisville this season.

The other change is at third base, where Todd Frazier gets the job full-time for Scott Rolen, who decided not to return for another season. Frazier filled in at third base and at first base when Rolen and Joey Votto were hurt, and ended up third in NL Rookie of the Year voting after batting .273 with 19 homers and 67 RBIs.



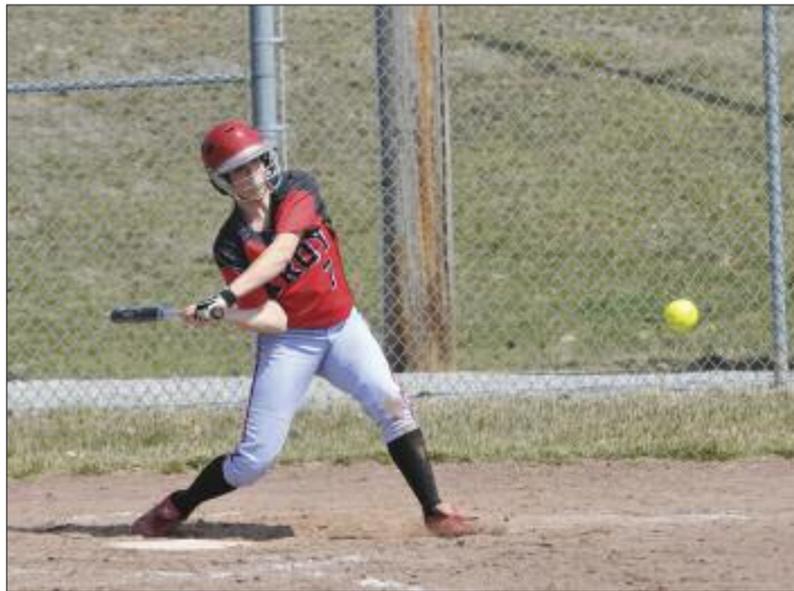
Cincinnati Reds' Joey Votto bats against the Los Angeles Dodgers in an exhibition spring training game Friday, March 22 in Glendale, Ariz. AP PHOTO

■ Softball

Troy-ME



Troy's second baseman Rainey Rohlf throws a Miami East runner out Saturday.



Troy's Jamie Snay takes a cut at a pitch Saturday against Miami East.

■ CONTINUED FROM A7 last year to now is phenomenal."

For Troy (1-1), all it took was one inning in the early game. Smith and Allison Pierce hit back-to-back double in the five-run fifth inning, while Megan Schreiber had a pair of hits in the game.

"Hitting is contagious, and we're always looking for those leaders, the ones that step up and get it started," Campbell said. "Because once it's started, it's hard to stop. And I pitched in college, so I know that once they start hitting you, you change the way you're pitching. That's our goal — to not let them pitch their game."

It was the lone bad inning for Miami East's Paige Kiesewetter, who was solid throughout. She also had a triple and Kris Bigelow drove her in with a single in the top of the sixth, but the Vikings (1-1) could manage little against Troy's Smith.

"That's something we should be able to rely on all year long — playing good defense and getting great pitching," Miami East coach Brian Kadel said. "We just had one inning where we didn't make plays, and Troy took advantage."

The Vikings (1-1), in turn, took advantage of three Troy errors in the opening inning of the late game, and Sarah O'Neal capped the inning off with an RBI single to make it a 3-0 game. Miami East then had three infield singles to load the bases with no one

out in the second inning, and Troy starter Mackenzie Vernon looked to be in big trouble.

"We didn't bunt well in that first game, so it was good to see us get some down in the second one," Kadel said.

But Vernon induced a grounder back to herself and got a force at the plate, Kiesewetter hit an RBI sac fly and Vernon fielded another one to end the threat by only giving up one run.

And from there Vernon continued to work out of tough spots, leaving five runners stranded over the next three innings — three in scoring position — and not giving up another run until the Vikings tacked on an insurance run on an RBI single by O'Neal in the seventh.

"We have a young team, and even for some of the girls that are not young in years, it's their first time either playing or starting on varsity," Campbell said. "We have three seniors, two juniors, and the rest are sophomores. We know we have work to do on their mental game. But the girls are getting their composure, and we were able to hang on (after the second)."

The Trojans just couldn't solve Denlinger.

STAFF PHOTOS/JOSH BROWN



Miami East shortstop Christine Bowling throws to first for an out Saturday at Troy.

Schreiber led off the bottom of the fifth with Troy's first hit of the game, but with runners on second and third with one out, Denlinger worked out of it unscathed. Schreiber then drove home Troy's only run in the sixth with a two-out single, but Denlinger — who also was 3 for 4 at the plate in the game — set down the next four straight batters to end the game.

"Sam hits her spots, keeps the ball down and trusts her defense to make plays behind her," Kadel said. "You don't have to blow it by people if you do

those things, and we were able to work out of jams on defense."

Both teams are at home on Monday — weather permitting, as more snow is in the forecast. Troy is set to host Beavercreek, while Miami East will face Tecumseh.

ME000 002 0 — 2 5 4
Troy000 050 x — 5 5 1
Kiesewetter and O'Neal. Smith and Je. Snay. WP — Smith. LP — Kiesewetter. 2B — Smith (T), Pierce (T). 3B — Kiesewetter (M).
ME310 000 1 — 5 8 1
Troy000 001 0 — 1 4 6
Denlinger and O'Neal. Vernon, Smith (7) and Je. Snay. WP — Denlinger. LP — Vernon. **Records:** Miami East 1-1, Troy 1-1.

■ Major League Baseball



Cleveland Indians manager Terry Francona signs for fans before a spring training game against the Chicago Cubs Sunday, March 24 in Goodyear, Ariz. AP PHOTO

Indians a whole new challenge for Francona

CLEVELAND (AP) — Terry Francona helped exorcise the Bambino's curse, bringing the Red Sox a World Series title for the first time in 86 years.

His new challenge is ending a 64-year championship drought.

And this time, it's personal.

Refreshed from a year away from the game's ruthless grind following a messy exit in Boston, Francona has come "home" to try to take the Cleveland Indians to the top. Chosen as the club's manager in October, Francona has invigorated a franchise he has known since childhood, when his father, Tito, played for the Indians.

"This where I wanted to be," Francona said. "This was the only job I wanted."

Loving every minute so far, he even agreed to dress up as a baby for his players this spring.

The Indians, who collapsed last season under Manny Acta, have been overhauled for Francona. Cleveland owner Paul Dolan, criticized for penny-pinching in the past, spent \$117 million on free agents this winter, a striking, big-ticket spending spree that brought All-Star center fielder Michael Bourn, first baseman Nick Swisher, pitcher Brett Myers and slugger Mark Reynolds to Cleveland. The club also traded for outfielder Drew Stubbs and infielder Mike Aviles and signed Jason

• Look in Monday's Troy Daily News for a full-page poster preview of the upcoming MLB season.

Giambi, Ryan Raburn and Scott Kazmir.

Cleveland got real serious.

"You don't bring over a guy like Terry Francona if you don't expect to win, and win soon," said Swisher, who signed a four-year, \$56 million contract — the largest for a free agent in Indians history — after playing the past four years with the Yankees. "Not only bring over Terry, but you bring in all these other high-profile guys and all of a sudden this young core of guys you have here are like, 'All right, here we go, this is what we need.'"

The Indians needed an infusion of something, anything, following their disappointing 2012 season, when they were in contention for four months before going 18-45 after July 27 and finishing fourth in the AL Central.

Francona's arrival has changed everything. The Indians sold out their home opener in 6 minutes and predictably pessimistic Cleveland fans, who have seen many promising and pennant-winning seasons end short of a first World Series championship since the last one in 1948, are beginning to believe this could be a magical year.

■ Baseball/Softball

Roundup

■ CONTINUED FROM A7 day. And that's not taking anything away from Wayne's pitching, either. They threw pretty decent. We just hit the ball the other way hard, we hit with power and everyone contributed in both games."

And it all started with a bunt.

Devin Blakely — the No. 9 hitter in the order — bunted his way on the top of the third, kicking off a seven-run inning that set the tone for the rest of the day.

"Devin got us going," Welker said. "He led off the third with a drag bunt, stole a base and really put pressure on the Wayne defense."

Blakely finished the first game 3 for 3 with two runs and an RBI. Collin Moeller hit a homer and had two RBIs, Greg Johnson was 2 for 5 with a double, two runs and two RBIs, Ian Nadolny

doubled, Kevin McGraw was 3 for 3 with a double, two runs and two RBIs and Nick Sanders was 2 for 3 with two runs and two RBIs.

Ben Langdon got the win, throwing four-plus innings, and Kyle Croft finished the game for a save.

In the second game, Zach Kendall dominated on the hill, striking out 10 in a five-inning shutout.

Nick Sanders was 2 for 4 with a triple, two runs and two RBIs, Johnson doubled and had two RBIs, Dylan Cascaden was 3 for 3 with three runs and three RBIs, Alex Magoteaux was 2 for 3 with two runs, Cam Weaver was 2 for 2 with two runs and an RBI and Blakely was 2 for 3 with two runs.

Troy hosts Tecumseh Tuesday in its home opener. Troy007 022 1 — 12 14 2
Wayne000 231 1 — 7 12 2
Langdon, Croft (5) and Nadolny. Mohr, L. Turner (4), J. Turner (7) and Jaques. WP — Langdon. LP —

Mohr. SV — Croft. 2B — Johnson (T), Nadolny (T), McGraw (T), Fox (W). HR — Moeller (T), L. Turner (W), Pierce (W).

Troy220 45 — 13 14 0
Wayne000 00 — 0 4 2
Kendall and Magoteaux. Pierce, Strong (5) and Wills. WP — Kendall. LP — Pierce. 2B — Johnson (T), J. Turner (W). 3B — Sanders (T). **Records:** Troy 2-0, Wayne 0-2.

• Softball
Tipp 25, WM 3;
Piqua 6, Tipp 0

PIQUA — After seeing his team spend all of its offense in the opener of a tri against Watkins Memorial and Piqua, Tippecanoe coach Charles Tackett wanted one thing.

"We need to be more consistent," he said. "We've got to work harder. We're not where we want to be yet."

The Red Devils (1-1) hammered out 21 hits against Watkins Memorial, scoring 10 times in the first inning on the way to a 25-3 victory. But against host

Piqua, Tippecanoe missed out on every chance it had, falling 6-0 and splitting on the day.

Steph Kraska had four hits with two doubles and a home run, two RBIs and five runs scored against Watkins Memorial. Cassie Gingerich had two hits and two runs, Bri Eichbaum — who also got the win pitching — had a double, two RBIs and three runs, Kristin Mace had two hits, two RBIs and three runs, Jordynn Kostyal had a double, two runs and two RBIs, Hannah Beck had two doubles, three RBIs and two runs, Lauren Goodall had four hits and four runs, Allie Muse had two hits, two RBIs and three runs and Megan Rittenhouse had a double and two RBIs.

But against Piqua, Gingerich had a pair of hits and Kostyal doubled as the Devils managed only six hits.

"We left nine on base in that game and just did not string together hits like we did in the first one," Tackett said. "We need to be more consistent."

Tippecanoe travels to West Carrollton Monday.

Tipp(10)45 15 — 25 21 2
WM030 00 — 3 6 7
Eichbaum, Kraska (4) and Goodall. WP — Eichbaum. 2B — Eichbaum (T), Kostyal (T), Beck 2 (T), Kraska 2 (T), Rittenhouse (T). HR — Kraska (T).

Tipp000 000 0 — 0 6 3
Piqua111 003 x — 6 12 4
Eichbaum and Kostyal. Dotson and McCanley. WP — Dotson. LP — Eichbaum. 2B — Kostyal (T). **Records:** Tippecanoe 1-1.

M-U 13, Wayne 7;
Greenville 7, M-U 1

GREENVILLE — The Milton-Union Bulldogs opened the Greenville Invitational — and the season — with an offensive explosion, pounding Wayne 13-7. But faced with host Greenville in the second game, Milton-Union could

find no offense in a 7-1 loss Saturday.

Against the Warriors, Chloe Smith was 3 for 5 with a triple and three RBIs, Ashley Smith was 3 for 5 with two doubles and two RBIs, Chelsey Smith was 2 for 4 with three RBIs and Jesse Bowman was 2 for 4. Claire Fetters — who drove in four runs — got the win on the mound, striking out five and walking three.

Brittney Courtright tripled against Greenville, one of only two hits for the Bulldogs (1-1).

Milton-Union hosts Troy Tuesday.

M-U322 220 2 — 13 13 4
Wayne003 112 0 — 7 8 7
Fetters and B. Courtright. Willis and Cahill. WP — Fetters. LP — Willis. 2B — A. Smith 2 (M). 3B — Chl. Smith (M).

M-U000 100 0 — 1 2 4
Gville100 141 x — 7 7 2
A. Smith and Courtright. Russell and Petry. WP — Russell. LP — A. Smith. 3B — B. Courtright (M). **Records:** Milton-Union 1-1.