



## Austin Peay Picked as 2013 OVC Baseball Favorites; Preseason All-OVC Team Announced

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**BRENTWOOD, Tenn.** -- After winning the Ohio Valley Conference regular season and tournament championships each of the past two years, **Austin Peay** has been tabbed the 2013 preseason favorite for the 11-team league in a vote of OVC head baseball coaches and sports information directors. In additional voting APSU junior second baseman **Jordan Hankins** and Tennessee Tech junior first baseman **Zach Stephens** were named OVC Preseason Co-Players of the Year while Belmont senior lefty **Chase Brookshire** was tabbed OVC Preseason Pitcher of the Year.

The first-place votes in the preseason poll were split among two schools with Austin Peay picking up 14 of the votes and OVC newcomer Belmont picking up the other eight. The Bruins won both the Atlantic Sun regular season and tournament championships in 2012, its last season in that conference before joining the OVC. Overall Austin Peay received 193 total points to be picked the favorite while **Belmont** finished with 182 points. **Jacksonville State** (156 points) was picked third and followed by **Eastern Kentucky** (139), **Eastern Illinois** (133), **Tennessee Tech** (107), **SIUE** (91), **Southeast Missouri** (73), **Morehead State** (70), **Murray State** (45) and **UT Martin** (21).

In all, 14 players were selected to the Preseason All-OVC team. The 14 players represented nine of the 11 teams who will compete for the OVC championship this season. Austin Peay and Morehead State led the way with three selections apiece while Eastern Kentucky had two players on the team. Belmont, Eastern Illinois, Murray State, Southeast Missouri, SIUE and Tennessee Tech each had one selection.

After not making the OVC Tournament field in either 2009 or 2010, Austin Peay has been the top team in the OVC each of the past two years, compiling a 74-48 overall and 36-13 OVC record over that time period while earning NCAA Regional victories over Georgia Tech (2011), Indiana State (2012) and Cal State Fullerton (2012). This year the Gobs return 14 players and five positional starters from last year's 40-win team. At the top of the list of returnees is Hankins, the Preseason Co-Player of the Year. The second baseman hit .336 with 16 doubles, 10 home runs and 66 RBI a season ago on his way to first-team All-OVC honors. After the season he was named to the OVC All-Tournament team as well as the Eugene All-Regional squad. This past summer he was a member of the USA Baseball Collegiate National Team, joining a select group of 30 players from across the country. This preseason he has been named a Preseason All-American by the NCBWA and *Collegiate Baseball* newspaper. Two other Preseason All-OVC selections return for the Gobs in senior shortstop **Reed Harper** (.327, 17 doubles, 3 home runs, 36 RBI) and senior outfielder **Cody Hudson** (.300, 6 home runs, 36 RBI, 21 stolen bases). The pitching staff is buoyed by senior starter **Casey Delgado** (9-4, 61 strikeouts in 103.0 IP) and senior closer **Tyler Rogers** (12 saves, 2.26 ERA in 38 appearances). Austin Peay head coach **Gary McClure** returns for his 26th season as head coach at his alma mater; McClure is only 25 victories away from breaking the OVC's all-time wins mark. Last year McClure became the first coach to record 300 OVC victories in a career.

After 11 years in the Atlantic Sun Conference, Belmont begins its first season in the OVC this year. Head coach **Dave Jarvis** enters his 16th season at the helm of the Bruins program and 25th year as a collegiate head coach. Last season he guided the team to a 39-24 record, A-Sun regular season and tournament championships and berth in the Baton Rouge Regional of the NCAA Tournament. This season Belmont returns 19 letterwinners and six positional starters from that championship squad. Among those returners is Brookshire, the senior left-handed pitcher who was named the OVC Preseason Pitcher of the Year. In 16 starts last season he compiled an 8-4 record and a 2.45 E.R.A. in 110 innings of work. He struck out 81 batters while walking just 26 and holding opponents to a .217 batting average. Also returning is senior outfielder **Drew Turner** who hit .298 with 24 RBI and 17 stolen bases a season ago.

Jacksonville State finished third in the OVC last season (17-10) and lost to eventual tournament champion Austin Peay in the OVC Tournament. This season 12th year head coach **Jim Case** returns 17 players and four positional starters from that team. The Gamecocks did not place a player on the Preseason All-OVC team but among its returning players is junior shortstop **Coty Blanchard**, who spent the summer playing for the Falmouth Commodores in the Cape Cod League. Blanchard, who was named a Louisville Slugger Freshman All-American in 2011, is also the quarterback of the JSU football team. Also back is junior catcher **Cal Lambert** who hit .271 with 14 doubles and 23 RBI a season ago.

Eastern Kentucky was the surprise team in the OVC last season; after being picked sixth in the league's preseason poll the Colonels finished 19-7 in OVC play to share the OVC regular season championship (with Austin Peay). It marked the team's first regular season crown since 2000 while the squad's 31 overall victories was the first 30-plus win season for the team since 2004. This season fifth-year head coach **Jason Stein** will look to take his alma mater to its fourth-straight OVC Tournament and will do so while looking to replace two of its top three pitchers (including OVC Pitcher of the Year Matt Fyffe) and five positional starters. The team had two players selected to the Preseason All-OVC team in junior third baseman **Bryan Soloman** (14 home runs, 46 RBI, .547 slugging percentage a season ago) and senior starting pitcher **Shane Grimm** (6-4, 3.14 E.R.A. in 77.1 innings of work). Also returning is senior **Anthony Bazzani**, who saved eight games last year (but is projected as a starter this season) and was a 31st round MLB Draft Pick but decided to return to school, and senior outfielder **Austin Grisham** (.320, 31 RBI, 16 stolen bases).

The No. 4 seed in last year's OVC Tournament, Eastern Illinois won its first three games of the event to advance to the Championship Round, but suffered back-to-back shutouts at the hands of eventual champion Austin Peay in coming up just short of its third OVC Tournament crown and a berth in the NCAA Tournament. Overall the Panthers were strong down the stretch in 2012, winning 11 of its final 15

games of the regular season. This season head coach **Jim Schmitz**, now in his 19th season with the program, returns 17 letterwinners, five positional starters and seven total pitchers from that 29-29 squad. Among the players returning is OVC Freshman of the Year **Brant Valach** who hit .314 with 10 doubles and 28 RBI at third base on his way to Freshman All-American honors. Another young returning player is sophomore outfielder **Caleb Howell** who hit .316 with 37 runs scored and 19 RBI in his rookie season with the team. On the mound senior **Troy Barton** will lead the EIU attack; Barton was 9-5 with a 3.20 E.R.A. in 78.2 innings of work last season.

Tennessee Tech just missed out on the OVC Tournament field last season and this year the Golden Eagles return eight positional starters and 19 overall letterwinners as head coach **Matt Bragga** enters his 10th season as head coach. Among the returning players is Stephens, the junior first baseman who was named OVC Preseason Co-Player of the Year. Last season he ranked fourth nationally in home runs (18, 0.34/game) and sixth in slugging percentage (.696) while hitting .368 overall with 13 doubles and 52 RBI. Stephens, who has 28 home runs in two seasons of collegiate baseball, was a semifinalist for the Dick Howser Award and participated in the TD Ameritrade College Home Run Derby in Omaha last season. This preseason Stephens was named a third-team Preseason All-American by the NCBWA. The pitching staff will be anchored by senior **Tristan Archer** who had a 4-4 record and 4.04 E.R.A. in 89.0 innings last season; Archer struck out 76 batters in 14 starts a season ago.

After 34 years under the direction of head coach Gary Collins (who won over 1,000 career games), SIUE begins its first season of being postseason eligible with new head coach **Tony Stoecklin**, a SIUE alum who spent the previous 13 seasons on the Cougars staff, most of those in charge of the pitching staff. Stoecklin has 19 letterwinners returning from last year's team that was 28-29 overall and 13-14 in the OVC. After completing the reclassification process to Division I the program is now eligible to participate in both the OVC and NCAA Tournaments. The team placed one player on the Preseason All-OVC squad in junior pitcher **Travis Felax**. Last season Felax compiled a 6-5 record and impressive 3.67 E.R.A. in 95.2 innings of work; he struck out 69 batters and had two complete games among his 15 starts. Among the positional starters returning is senior infielder **Joel Greating** who hit .304 with eight home runs and 40 RBI a year ago.

Following the 2012 season head coach Mark Hogan, who spent 18 years at his alma mater, retired, paving the way for pitching coach **Steve Bieser**, another Redhawk alum, to take over and serve as the interim coach this season. After playing at Southeast, Bieser would go on to play for the New York Mets and Pittsburgh Pirates as a utility player and catcher. This year marks his third overall with the program and he will have 19 letterwinners, five positional starters and 11 total pitchers returning from last season's team that was sixth in the OVC. Among those returning players is Preseason All-OVC selection **Derek Gibson**. The junior outfielder hit .338 with 32 runs, 12 doubles, seven home runs and 38 RBI a season ago.

Morehead State also has a new head coach for 2013 as **Mike McGuire** begins his first season as the program's head coach. It marks a return home for McGuire who was the program's pitching coach in the 1995 and 1996 seasons. Most recently he led Louisburg to a school-record 52 victories and the No. 1 ranking in the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). The Eagles have three players on the Preseason All-OVC team including senior closer **Matt Duncan**, junior utility player **Nick Duff** and senior outfielder **Taylor Pickens**. Duncan, a second-team All-OVC pick last year, compiled 13 saves in his debut season with the program; the 13 saves were the second-most in OVC history. Duff was also a second-team All-OVC pick a year ago after hitting .315 with 37 runs scored, six home runs and 34 RBI. Pickens hit .330 with 43 runs scored, 10 doubles and 25 RBI in 49 starts for MSU.

Murray State is looking to bounce back after back-to-back seasons of missing out on the OVC Tournament field. This year the Thoroughbreds return 18 letterwinners, eight positional starters and eight pitchers from last season's team that was 23-33 overall and topped No. 2 Kentucky in the last week of the regular season. Returning for the squad is junior designated hitter **Brandon Eggenschwiler** who is a Preseason All-OVC selection. A season ago he hit .370 with 32 RBI in 38 games. Other returning offensive threats include senior first baseman **Mike Kozlowski** (.306, 39 RBI) and junior outfielder **Ty Stetson** (.300, 5 triples, 31 RBI). Now in his 10th year at his alma mater, head coach **Rob McDonald** also returns senior closer **Will Handlin** who had four saves and a 3.56 E.R.A. last season.

Head coach **Bubba Cates**, now in his 15th season with UT Martin, will mix 23 returning letterwinners with 10 newcomers for the 2013 season. Cates will turn towards senior hurler **Dan Tobik** to lead his pitching staff this season. Tobik made 27 relief appearances a season ago, striking out 66 and walking only 22 in 55 innings of work; the senior recorded five saves and had a 2.78 E.R.A. for the Skyhawks. Offensively, senior outfielder **Grant Glasser** returns after hitting .293 with 29 runs scored and 18 RBI last season.

The 65th season of OVC baseball will get underway on Friday, Feb. 15 with the first weekend of league play being held March 8-10. The season will culminate with the 2013 OVC Championship which will be held for the fourth year in a row at Pringles Park in Jackson, Tenn. Pringles Park is the home of the Jackson Generals, the Double-A affiliate of the Seattle Mariners. The tournament runs May 22-26.

## 2013 OVC Baseball Predicted Order of Finish

(Selected by OVC Head Baseball Coaches and Sports Information Directors)

<u>Order of Finish</u>	<u>Points</u>
1. Austin Peay (14 first-place votes)	193
2. Belmont (8)	182
3. Jacksonville State	156
4. Eastern Kentucky	139
5. Eastern Illinois	133
6. Tennessee Tech	107
7. SIUE	91
8. Southeast Missouri	73
9. Morehead State	70
10. Murray State	45
11. UT Martin	21

(10 points awarded for a first-place vote, 9 for second, etc. - Coaches/SID's could not vote for their own teams)

## 2013 Preseason All-Ohio Valley Conference Baseball Team

(Selected by OVC Head Baseball Coaches and Sports Information Directors)

**Preseason OVC Co-Player of the Year:** Jordan Hankins (2B), Austin Peay

**Preseason OVC Co-Player of the Year:** Zach Stephens (1B), Tennessee Tech

**Preseason OVC Pitcher of the Year:** Chase Brookshire (LHP), Belmont

<u>POS.</u>	<u>NAME. SCHOOL</u>	<u>HT.</u>	<u>WT.</u>	<u>CL.</u>	<u>HOMETOWN</u>	<u>KEY STATS FROM 2012</u>
C	Jacob Reese, Eastern Illinois	5-10	195	Jr.	Rochester, Ill.	.271, 58 hits, 28 runs, 12 2B, 35 RBI
1B	Zach Stephens, Tennessee Tech #	6-0	225	Jr.	Hixson, Tenn.	.368, 75 hits, 44 runs, 13 2B, 18 HR, 52 RBI
2B	Jordan Hankins, Austin Peay *	5-10	191	Jr.	Wentzville, Mo.	.336, 84 hits, 52 runs, 10 HR, 66 RBI
SS	Reed Harper, Austin Peay	6-3	200	Sr.	Clarksville, Tenn.	.327, 87 hits, 49 runs, 17 2B, 36 RBI
3B	Bryan Soloman, Eastern Kentucky	6-4	225	Jr.	Monroe, Conn.	.271, 55 hits, 30 runs, 15 2B, 14 HR, 46 RBI
OF	Derek Gibson, Southeast Missouri *	6-3	220	Jr.	Bonne Terre, Mo.	.338, 66 hits, 32 runs, 12 2B, 38 RBI
OF	Cody Hudson, Austin Peay #	6-0	195	Sr.	Germantown, Tenn.	.300, 64 hits, 39 runs, 12 2B, 36 RBI, 21 SB
OF	Taylor Pickens, Morehead State	6-0	170	Sr.	Claremont, Ill.	.330, 68 hits, 43 runs, 10 2B, 25 RBI
DH	Brandon Eggenschwiler, Murray State #	6-0	180	Jr.	Lexington, Ky.	.370, 44 hits, 17 runs, 32 RBI
UT	Nick Duff, Morehead State #	6-1	175	Jr.	Morehead, Ky.	.315, 56 hits, 37 runs, 6 HR, 34 RBI
SP	Travis Felax, SIUE #	6-4	235	Jr.	Troy, Ill.	3.67 ERA, 6-5, 2 CG, 95.2 IP, 69 K's
SP	Shane Grimm, Eastern Kentucky #	6-3	205	Sr.	Paintsville, Ky.	3.14 ERA, 6-4, 2 CG, 77.1 IP, 38 K's
SP	Chase Brookshire, Belmont	6-0	195	Sr.	Chattanooga, Tenn.	2.45 ERA, 8-4, 1 CG, 110.0 IP, 81 K's
RP	Matt Duncan, Morehead State #	5-10	195	Sr.	Brownsburg, Ind.	2.45 ERA, 2-1, 13 saves, 33.0 IP, 30 K's

\* - 1st team All-OVC team in 2012

# - 2nd team All-OVC team in 2012

