

## Opening Day 2012! A Look Ahead by Dylan Vazzano

HYANNIS, MA - It's finally that time of year again. The nation's best embark on their journey to the center of summer baseball Mecca. Long picturesque days of sun shine brilliance turn into electric charged nights of America's past time in its truest and most eloquent form. And smack right dab in the middle of all the joyous action sets a village hankering to end a now 21 year Cape League title drought. The days of New England's beloved son, Jason Varitek, hoisting a 1991 championship crown at the ripe age of 19 are distant memories, so much so that as this year's campaign gets going, it's the first time in recent recollection that Varitek can no longer call Fenway Park home. Hyannis is starving for Cape Cod Baseball League glory, but a locked and loaded 2012 roster should have fans saying, "Is this the year?"

Now in its third summer as the new look Harbor Hawks, the franchise is currently caught in a tremendous wave of upward momentum. The 2011 season saw fans flock night in and night out into McKeon, as the ball club compiled a year of historical and epic proportions. The Hawks, with a regular season record of 29-15, won their first ever Western Division regular season championship and finished with the Cape's best overall mark for the first time in more than three decades. Hyannis also ended the league's longest-running playoff drought by making its first postseason appearance since 2004. Although the squad was upended by the Falmouth Commodores in the first-round, the unbelievable campaign captivated thousands, brought energy to Hyannis, and in some sort of a monumental way, "officially" opened up the Harbor Hawk era.

Trite to say, but 2011 is a thing of the past. As we shift into the summer of 2012, the old adage of "hope springs eternal" is alive and well as this year's Hawks bring in an incredible wealth of potential into opening day. Time to see how and why.

Speaking of old adage's, in baseball terms none might be older than "good pitching beats good hitting," and this year's squad is chalk full of good, if not dominant arms. Let's begin with righty David Garner (**Michigan State**). Garner finished the 2012 season with a record of 6-3, an era of 3.28, and struck out an impressive 75 batters in 74 innings pitching in the elite Big Ten Conference. Last summer in limited action, playing for the Southern Ohio Copperheads of the Great Lakes Collegiate League, the native of Niles, Michigan fanned 20 batters in 14 innings and collected four saves with a 1.29 ERA. Garner's got the numbers and with high ratings of the No. 2 prospect in the Great Lakes Collegiate League by Baseball America, and the No. 3 prospect by Perfect Game Cross Checker, make him a legitimate Hawk hurler.

Aside from Garner, make sure to keep a keen eye on 6'4" righty Jeff Hoffman, (**East Carolina**) who has been tabbed by his head coach as a "flame thrower," and has the stats to back it up in what was only his freshman campaign. The Latham, New York native sported a winning record while holding opposing batters to a team leading .224 batting average against in the 2012 year. Southpaw Sean Manaea (**Indiana State**) boasts tremendous summer potential with an unreal 115 strikeouts in 105 innings in his 2012 season, making a team high 17 starts for the Sycamores with a 5-3 record and 3.34 era. Then there's Sasha Kuebel (**Iowa**) and Carson Cross (**Uconn**). While pitching in the Big Ten for the Hawkeyes, Kuebel was a perfect 6-0, posting a 2.67 era in 13 starts, while Cross maintained a miniscule 1.21 ERA and .210 batting average against

as a member of the 2012 Huskies.

From an offensive standpoint, the conversation has to start and end with DJ Peterson (**New Mexico**). The sophomore from Gilbert, Arizona compiled video game like numbers of a .419 batting average, 17 home runs, and 78 RBI's for the Lobos in 2012 and can man either side of the infield diamond. There are grumblings of a potential departure with Team USA, but if Peterson does indeed come to Hyannis, you can expect big things.

In the outfield Zac Zellers (**Kentucky**), and Dominic Jose (**Stanford**) show promise while playing in the highly touted SEC and Pac-12. Zellers finished third on the 2012 Wildcats with an impressive .311 batting average, smacking five home runs, driving in 19, and leading the team with a .456 on base percentage. Jose, despite only appearing in 19 games, batted a stellar .385 with one long ball, 11 runs batted in, while compiling an outstanding .489 on base percentage. He was one of three Cardinal that will suit up in Hawks blue and orange this summer, as RHP Sahil Bloom and middle infielder Brett Michael Doran will make the trip from Palo Alto as well.

The middle infield, among many, will feature Zach Alvord (**Auburn**) and Brandon Trinkwon (**Santa Barbara**), both of whom come into their Hawks tenure with proven track records. Alvord is a former Cape Leaguer, patrolling shortstop for the Bourne Braves last summer. As a member of the Tigers, Alvord led the team with six home runs in the 2012 campaign. For Trinkwon, the Tustin, California native batted .347 in 2012, leading the Gauchos in doubles with 17 and on base percentage at .460.

Behind the dish, there's a lot to like about Brad Zebedis (**Presbyterian**) and Blake Austin (**Auburn**). Zebedis, who is also listed as first baseman, put up solid numbers of a .270 batting average, six home runs, and 19 RBI's in the 2012 Blue Hose season, but his numbers as a freshman were off the charts. The native of Rock Hill, South Carolina was a Louisville Slugger Freshman All-American with a staggering .425 batting average, 13 round trippers, and 57 runs batted in. As far as Austin is concerned, the sophomore from Douglasville, Georgia hit .296 with three home runs and 21 runs batted in.

So settle in to beautiful McKeon Park, bask in the rich aroma of neighboring seas, hear the stunning call beyond the outfield wall of the Hy-Line ready for a voyage to Nantucket, and prepare your pallet for the triumphant return of the walking taco. Summer baseball in Hyannis is back in business!

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*In addition to his broadcasting abilities, Dylan Vazzano also covers the team throughout the season with game recaps posted here on Harborhawks.org. Dylan Vazzano begins his second season as a Hyannis play-by-play voice today in Cotuit. He and veteran sidekick Nick Johnson have the call of Opening Day, **beginning with a short pregame before a 5 p.m. first pitch.***