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USA BASEBALL ANNOUNCES 2017 17U NATIONAL TEAM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM STAFF

Mike Fox and Jack Leggett tapped to manage teams in 2017

DURHAM, N.C. – The coaching staff and evaluators for the 2017 17U National Team Development Program (NTDP) were announced by USA Baseball on Tuesday. 2010 USA Baseball Rod Dedeaux Coach of the Year, Eric Kibler, has been selected to lead the staff as the field coordinator for the second consecutive year and fourth time overall.

Current University of North Carolina head coach, Mike Fox, and former Clemson University head coach Jack Leggett will join Kibler on staff in 2017, and will serve as the managers of the Stars and Stripes teams, respectively.

Coaches and evaluators will assess 40 athletes during the NTDP week and are made up of former professional players, respected collegiate and high school coaches, and professional scouts.

Currently the head coach at Horizon High School (Scottsdale, Ariz.), Kibler is a six-time USA Baseball coaching alum and led the 2010 16U National Team to a gold medal at the Pan American “AA” Youth Championships after gaining his first coaching experience within the organization in 2009. He also helped lead the 18U National Team to a gold medal at the 2015 World Baseball Softball Confederation U-18 World Cup when he served as an assistant coach. Kibler has previously served as the 17U NTDP field coordinator in 2012, 2014 and 2016.

Jeff Kunkel and 2017 18U National Team assistant coach Gregg Ritchie will join Kibler as additional evaluators. Kunkel currently serves as a pro scout for the Detroit Tigers and will make his USA Baseball coaching debut in 2017. Ritchie is currently in his fifth season as the head coach at George Washington University. Six additional coaches will lead the NTDP’s Stars and Stripes teams.

2008 *Baseball America* National Coach of the Year, Fox, will lead the Stars team in 2017. Former MLB veteran Ernie Young will back Fox, serving as the assistant coach. Young represented the United States at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and on the 2003 Olympic qualifying team. Wes Johnson, who currently serves as the pitching coach at the University of Arkansas, will guide the team’s pitching staff.

ABCA Hall of Famer Leggett will manage the 2017 Stripes team, and will be joined by Georgia Tech assistant coach Mike Nickeas and Cal State Fullerton pitching coach Blake Hawksworth.

USA Baseball will utilize a rolling invitation process for the 17U NTDP participants in 2017. The players will be selected from the 2016 USA Baseball National Team Identification Series (NTIS), the 2017 17U National Team Championships in Arizona and Florida, and through recommendations from scouts, coaches and the amateur baseball community.

The USA Baseball National Team Development Program offers athletes an opportunity to connect with USA Baseball staff to better prepare for future national team experience. The program includes skill development sessions, off-field education seminars, intrasquad Stars vs. Stripes games and exposure to professional scouts, college recruiters and the 18U National Team staff and task force.

The 2017 17U NTDP will take place July 22–28 in Chicago and will feature intrasquad scrimmages at Northwestern University and Wrigley Field.

The coaching staff and their bios are as follows:

Name, NTDP Position, Current/Former Position

Mike Fox, Stars Manager, University of North Carolina Head Coach
Blake Hawksworth, Stripes Pitching Coach, Cal State Fullerton Pitching Coach
Wes Johnson, Stars Pitching Coach, University of Arkansas Pitching Coach
Eric Kibler, Field Coordinator, Horizon (AZ) High School Head Coach
Jeff Kunkel, Pitching Evaluator, Detroit Tigers Scout
Jack Leggett, Stripes Manager, Former Clemson University Head Coach
Mike Nickeas, Stripes Assistant Coach, Georgia Tech Assistant Coach
Gregg Ritchie, Evaluator, George Washington University Head Coach
Ernie Young, Stars Assistant Coach, Former MLB and USA Baseball player

Mike Fox, now in his 19th season as the head coach at the University of North Carolina, has guided his alma mater to its most successful period in school history and firmly established the Tar Heels as one of the nation's preeminent college baseball programs. Under Fox, the Tar Heels have made six trips to the College World Series since 2006, have been to the postseason 15 times and have won more than 800 games in 19 seasons. Fox was named *Baseball America's* National Coach of the Year in 2008 and the American Baseball Coaches Association has selected him as the Atlantic Region Coach of the Year three times. Fox recorded his 1,300th career victory in 2015, and at the beginning of the 2017 season he earned his 800th career win as UNC's head coach. Thirty of his former players were on Major League Baseball rosters in 2016, 83 athletes that played under him have been drafted by MLB organizations and Tar Heels have earned 26 different All-America honors under his guidance.

Blake Hawksworth is currently in his second year as the pitching coach at Cal State Fullerton. Prior to starting his coaching career, Hawksworth played professional baseball for 10 years in both the Saint Louis Cardinals and Los Angeles Dodgers organizations. Eight of those years came with the Cardinals who drafted him in 2001. He made his Major League debut with the team in 2009 and was a key contributor to the National League Central Division title, recording a 2.03 ERA over 40 innings. He later pitched for the Los Angeles Dodgers before injuries ended his playing career.

Wes Johnson is in his first year as the pitching coach at the University of Arkansas. Prior to joining the staff at Arkansas, Johnson served as the pitching coach at Mississippi State and Dallas Baptist University. In 2016, he helped Mississippi State win the SEC Regular Season Championship and advance to a Super Regional. Johnson is known nationally for his player development and this is highlighted by the fact that he has had 30 pitchers drafted or sign professional contracts over the last nine years.

Eric Kibler has been the head coach at Horizon High School in Scottsdale, Arizona, since 1981, and has led the program to six state titles during his tenure. In addition, Kibler has won 17 regionals and had three runner-up finishes in the state tournament. Kibler has tutored 28 players that were selected in the MLB Draft and has seen 150 of his players go on to play college baseball.

Jeff Kunkel is currently an scout for the Detroit Tigers, covering the upper Midwest. Prior to his scouting role, Kunkel served as a bullpen catcher for the team and played six seasons (2006-11) in the organization's minor league system. He also played collegiately at the University of Michigan where he earned All-Big Ten Conference honors in 2006 as a senior. That year he hit .335 with 38 runs scored, 15 doubles and 28 RBI.

Jack Leggett served as Clemson University's head coach for 22 seasons. In that time he led the Tigers to 955 victories, 21 NCAA Tournament appearances and six College World Series berths. Clemson was the seventh-winningest program in the nation during his time as head coach, while his six trips to Omaha tied for ninth most in the nation during his tenure. Leggett was a three-time ACC Coach of the Year recipient and was inducted into the ABCA Hall of Fame in 2014.

Mike Nickeas is a three-time USA Baseball alum and currently serves as an assistant coach at Georgia Tech. Nickeas played for Team USA on the 1999 16U National Team, the 2001 18U National Team and the 2003 Collegiate National Team. Before starting his coaching career, he played professional baseball for 11 years, including four years in the Major Leagues. He spent three years as a catcher for the New York Mets and one year with the Toronto Blue Jays before retiring following the 2014 season.

Gregg Ritchie is in his fifth season as the head coach at George Washington University. He was named Atlantic 10 Coach of the Year in 2013 after the Colonials went 15-9 in his first year at the helm. Prior to his time at George Washington, Ritchie played professionally in the San Francisco Giants and Texas Rangers systems until 1995

before starting his coaching career with the Chicago White Sox. He served as a hitting coach in Chicago's system for 10 years, then spent five years as the minor league hitting coordinator for the Pittsburgh Pirates before being named the hitting coach for the big league club in 2010. Ritchie began working with USA Baseball in 2016 as an assistant coach at the 17U NTDP and the 18U National Team Trials.

Ernie Young is a former MLB veteran who played for the Oakland Athletics, Kansas City Royals, Arizona Diamondbacks, Detroit Tigers and Cleveland Indians for parts of eight seasons after being drafted in the 10th round of the 1990 MLB Draft. Young, who attended Lewis University, belted 27 home runs and drove in 90 runs during his 288-game career. He led Team USA to a gold medal at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, hitting .385 and leading the team in RBIs (8), and played once more for the red, white and blue, in the 2003 COPABE Olympic Qualifying Tournament. After his retirement in 2007, he became a hitting coach in the Chicago White Sox organization and managed the West Michigan Whitecaps, the single-A affiliate of the Detroit Tigers, in 2012. In addition to his USA Baseball playing career he is a four-time coaching alumnus, highlighted by managing the 2011 Pan American Games Team and serving as the batting coach for the 2015 Pan American Games Team, both of which won silver medals.

About USA Baseball

USA Baseball is the national governing body for the sport of baseball in the United States and is a member of the United States Olympic Committee and the World Baseball Softball Confederation. The organization selects and trains the World Baseball Classic, Olympic, Premier12 and Pan Am teams (and all other USA Baseball Professional Teams); the USA Baseball Collegiate National Team; the USA Baseball 18U, 15U and 12U National Teams; and the USA Baseball Women's National Team, all of which participate in various international competitions each year. The organization is responsible for the continued proliferation and health of the sport, and leads a number of amateur initiatives including PLAYBALL and Pitch Smart. USA Baseball also presents the Golden Spikes Award annually to the top amateur baseball player in the country. For more information, please visit the organization's official websites: USABaseball.com, USABaseball.Education, PLAYBALL.org, PitchSmart.org, GoldenSpikesAward.com and USABaseballShop.com.

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