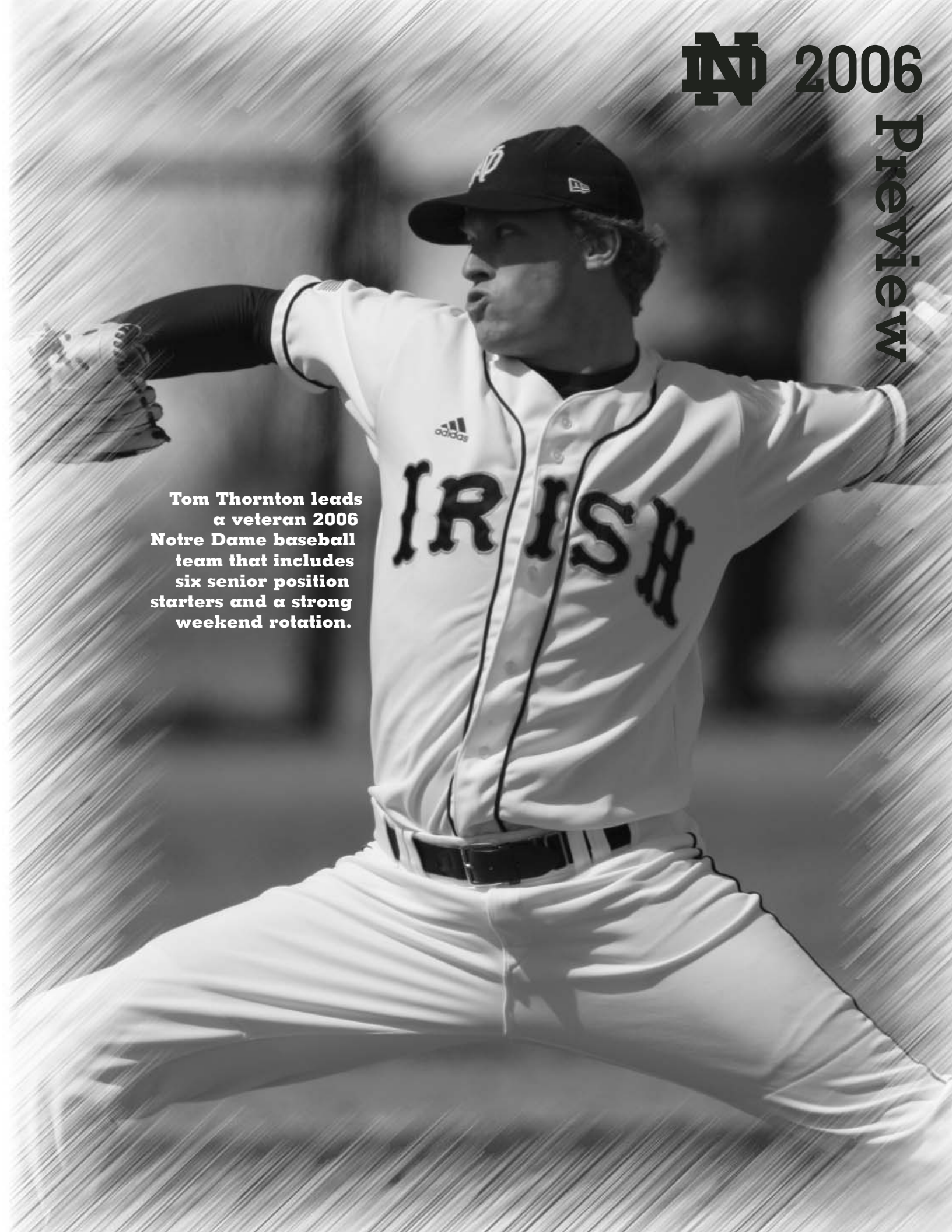


ND 2006

Preview

**Tom Thornton leads
a veteran 2006
Notre Dame baseball
team that includes
six senior position
starters and a strong
weekend rotation.**



Alphabetical Quick Roster

- 36 Andres, Steve
- 20 Barnes, Jeremy
- 12 Bransfield, Matt
- 7 Brezovsky, Ross
- 14 Connolly, Ryan
- 9 Cooper, Craig
- 6 Dressman, Danny
- 44 Dury, Mike
- 24 Elam, Sam
- 11 Gaston, Sean
- (23) Godwin, Cliff
- 21 Graffy, Brett
- 29 Gruener, David
- (28) Gumpf, John
- 22 Kapala, Dan
- 13 Korpi, Wade
- 3 Langford, Tony
- 2 Lilley, Brett
- 4 Lopez, Greg
- (1) Mainieri, Paul
- (25) Mainieri, Nick
- 34 Manship, Jeff
- 31 Many, Mike
- 14 Mendiola, Eddy
- 16 Nettey, Alex
- 35 Phelps, David
- 17 Rizzo, Cody
- (26) Rooney, Terry
- 45 Samardzija, Jeff
- 19 Seabaugh, John
- 8 Sharpley, Evan
- 5 Smith, Eddie
- 27 Soriano, Chris
- 32 Stewart, Jess
- 30 Thornton, Tom
- 33 Weiland, Kyle
- 51 Williamson, Joey

2006 University of Notre Dame Fighting Irish Baseball

No.	Name	Yr.	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	B-T	Birthdate	Hometown (Previous School)
2	Brett Lilley*	So.	IF (3B)	5-7	165	L-R	7/30/85	North Canton, OH (Hoover HS)
3	Tony Langford*	So.	RHP/OF	5-11	180	R-R	8/17/85	Fort Worth, TX (Fort Worth Country Day HS)
4	Greg Lopez*** (C)	Sr.	SS	6-0	190	R-R	1/18/84	Upper Arlington, OH (Upper Arlington HS)
5	Eddie Smith*	Sr.	IF	5-11	170	L-R	2/8/84	Olympia, WA (North Thurston HS)
6	Danny Dressman**	Jr.	OF	5-9	180	L-L	12/12/84	San Jose, CA (Archbishop Mitty HS)
7	Ross Brezovsky*	So.	IF (2B)	5-10	170	L-R	8/26/85	Naples, FL (Collier HS)
8	Evan Sharpley	Fr.	IF	6-2	210	L-R	11/4/86	Marshall, MI (Marshall HS)
9	Craig Cooper***	Sr.	1B/OF	6-1	220	R-L	10/27/84	Plainview, NY (Chaminade HS)
10	Ryan Connolly	Fr.	OF	6-0	175	R-R	5/3/87	Binghamton, NY (Binghamton HS)
11	Sean Gaston**	Jr.	C	6-0	175	L-R	2/12/85	Brownsburg, IN (Brownsburg HS)
12	Matt Bransfield***	Sr.	DH/1B/C	6-1	200	R-R	10/9/83	Englewood, CO (Cherry Creek HS)
13	Wade Korpi*	So.	LHP	5-10	180	R-L	3/10/86	Lake Worth, FL (Santalucas HS)
14	Eddy Mendiola	Fr.	3B	6-2	200	R-R	6/22/87	Miami, FL (Palmer Trinity HS)
16	Alex Nettey***	Sr.	OF (CF)	6-1	200	R-R	11/30/83	Dolton, IL (Thornridge HS)
17	Cody Rizzo***	Sr.	OF	6-1	200	R-R	1/17/84	Temecula, CA (Chaparral HS)
19	John Seabaugh	Jr.	RHP	6-0	205	R-R	5/8/85	Granger, IN (Penn HS)
20	Jeremy Barnes	Fr.	RHP/IF	5-11	185	R-R	4/13/87	Garland, TX (South Garland HS)
21	Brett Graffy	Fr.	RHP	6-2	185	R-R	3/12/87	Joliet, IL (Joliet Catholic Academy)
22	Dan Kapala**	Jr.	RHP	6-5	225	R-R	9/6/85	Royal Oak, MI (Shrine Catholic HS)
24	Sam Elam	Fr.	LHP	6-4	200	L-L	6/21/85	Mesquite, TX (Poteet HS)
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32	Jess Stewart**	Jr.	RHP	6-3	205	R-R	2/6/85	Manassas, VA (Osborn City HS)
33	Kyle Weiland	Fr.	RHP	6-4	170	R-R	9/12/86	Albuquerque, NM (Eldorado HS)
34	Jeff Manship*	Jr.	RHP	6-1	195	R-R	1/16/85	San Antonio, TX (Reagan HS)
35	David Phelps	Fr.	RHP	6-3	175	R-R	10/9/86	Hazelwood, MO (Hazelwood HS)
36	Steve Andres***	Sr.	LF/C	5-10	200	L-R	4/14/84	Napa, CA (Justin Siena HS)
44	Mike Dury**	Jr.	LHP/1B	6-5	235	S-R	9/19/84	Indianapolis, IN (Bishop Chatard HS)
45	Jeff Samardzija**	Jr.	RHP	6-5	215	R-R	1/23/85	Valparaiso, IN (Valparaiso HS)
51	Joey Williamson*	Fr.	RHP	6-1	195	R-R	1/28/86	Lantana, FL (Santaluce HS)

* - monograms won (C) - captains

Head Coach: #1 Paul Mainieri (St. Thomas '82, 12th season at Notre Dame)

Assistant Coaches: #26 Terry Rooney (Radford '96), #23 Cliff Godwin (East Carolina '00)

Volunteer Assistant: #28 John Gumpf (Cal State San Bernardino '97)

Student Assistant Coach: #25 Nick Mainieri (Notre Dame '06)

By Home State

Florida (4)

- Ross Brezovsky (Naples)
- Wade Korpi (Lake Worth)
- Eddy Mendiola (Miami)
- Joey Williamson (Lantana)

Indiana (4)

- Mike Dury (Indianapolis)
- Sean Gaston (Brownsburg)
- Jeff Samardzija (Valparaiso)
- John Seabaugh (Granger)

Texas (4)

- Jeremy Barnes (Garland)
- Sam Elam (Mesquite)
- Tony Langford (Fort Worth)
- Jeff Manship (San Antonio)

California (3)

- Steve Andres (Napa)
- Danny Dressman (San Jose)
- Cody Rizzo (Temecula)

Illinois (3)

- Brett Graffy (Joliet)
- Mike Many (Naperville)
- Alex Nettey (Dolton)

Michigan (2)

- Dan Kapala (Royal Oak)
- Evan Sharpley (Marshall)

New York (2)

- Ryan Connolly (Binghamton)
- Craig Cooper (Plainview)

Ohio (2)

- Brett Lilley (North Canton)
- Greg Lopez (Upper Arlington)

Washington (2)

- David Gruener (Gig Harbor)
- Eddie Smith (Olympia)

Colorado (1)

- Matt Bransfield (Englewood)

Massachusetts (1)

- Tom Thornton (Middleboro)

Missouri (1)

- David Phelps (Hazelwood)

New Jersey (1)

- Chris Soriano (Randolph)

New Mexico (1)

- Kyle Weiland (Albuquerque)

Virginia (1)

- Jess Stewart (Manassas)

Pronunciation Guide

- Steve ANN-drees
- Ross Bruh-ZOV-ski
- Mike DURR-ee
- Sam EE-lum
- Sean GAS-tun
- David GREW-nurr
- Wade CORE-pee

- Dan Kuh-PELL-uh
- Nick and Paul Muh-NAIR-ee
- Eddy Men-dee-O-luh
- Jeff Suh-MARR-zhuh
- John SEE-bah
- Chris Sore-ee-ON-oh
- Kyle WHY-lund

By Class

Seniors (8) - Andres (LF/C),

- Bransfield (DH/1B/C), Cooper (OF/1B), Lopez (SS), Nettey (OF), Rizzo (OF), Smith (IF), Thornton (LHP)

Juniors (8) - Dressman (OF), Dury

- (LHP/DH/1B), Gaston (C), Kapala (RHP), Manship (RHP), Samardzija (RHP), Seabaugh (RHP), Stewart (RHP)

Sophomores (7) - Brezovsky (IF),

- Gruener (LHP), Korpi (LHP), Langford (RHP/IF), Lilley (IF), Soriano (C) Williamson (RHP)

Sophomores (9) - Barnes (RHP/IF),

- Connolly (Util), Elam (LHP), Graffy (RHP), Many (C), Mendiola (3B), Phelps (RHP), Sharpley (IF), Weiland (RHP)

Depth Charts

Catcher - Gaston, Rizzom

Mendiola, Andres, Many, Soriano

First Base - Cooper, Dury, Sharpley

Second Base - Lilley, Barnes, Smith

Shortstop - Lopez, Barnes

Third Base - Brezovsky, Mendiola, Barnes

Left Field - Bransfield, Andres,

Center Field - Nettey, Dressman

Right Field - Rizzo, Dressman

Designated Hitter - Bransfield,

Andres, Dury, Langford, Barnes

Starting Pitchers - Thornton,

Samardzija, Manship, Korpi,

Phelps

Relievers - Kapala (inj.), Dury

Williamson, Langford, Weiland,

Elam, Stewart, Graffy, Gruener,

Seabaugh



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- 29 Gruener, David
- 30 Thornton, Tom
- 31 Many, Mike
- 32 Stewart, Jess
- 33 Weiland, Kyle
- 34 Manship, Jeff
- 35 Phelps, David
- 36 Andres, Steve
- 44 Dury, Mike
- 45 Samardzija, Jeff
- 51 Williamson, Joey

By Height

6-6
Tom Thornton, Sr., LHP

6-5
Mike Dury, Jr., 1B/LHP
Dan Kapala, Jr., RHP
Jeff Samardzija, Jr., RHP

6-4
Sam Elam, Fr., LHP

6-3
David Phelps, Fr., RHP
Jess Stewart, Jr., RHP
Kyle Weiland, Fr., RHP

6-2
Craig Cooper, Sr., OF
David Gruener, So., LHP
Brett Graffy, Fr., RHP
Mike Many, Fr., C
Evan Sharpley, Fr., IF

6-1
Matt Bransfield, Sr., LF/DH/C
Jeff Manship, Jr., RHP
Alex Nettey, Sr., OF
Cody Rizzo, Sr., OF
Chris Soriano, So., C
Joey Williamson, So., RHP

6-0
Ryan Connolly, Fr., OF
Sean Gaston, Jr., C
Greg Lopez, Sr., SS
Eddy Mendiola, Fr., 3B
John Seabaugh, Jr., RHP

5-11
Jeremy Barnes, Fr., RHP/IF
Tony Langford, So., RHP/OF
Eddie Smith, Sr., IF

5-10
Steve Andres, Sr., LF/C
Ross Brezovsky, Jr., OF
Wade Korpi, So., LHP

5-9
Danny Dressman, Jr., OF

5-7
Brett Lilley, So., 2B

Pronunciation Guide

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Ross Bruh-ZOV-ski	Nick and Paul Muh-NAIR-ee
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Sam EE-lum	Jeff Suh-MARR-zhuh
Sean GAS-tun	John SEE-bah
David GREW-nurr	Chris Sore-ee-ON-oh
Wade CORE-pee	Kyle WHY-lund

Support Staff

- Boo Corrigan - baseball administrator
- Mark Dumich - senior student manager
- Mike Ward - junior student manager
- Leonard Mikolajewski - volunteer manager
- Mike Bean - athletic trainer
- Pete LaFleur - sports information
- Mike Joseph - strength & conditioning coach
- Adam Sargent - academic services counselor





The term "senior moment" actually could prove to be a good thing for the 2006 Notre Dame baseball team, as the Irish embark on the promising season led by a veteran core that includes six potential senior starters in the everyday lineup. The 2006 Irish pitching staff sets up nicely as well, fronted by a strong three-man weekend rotation comprised of a senior and two highly-regarded juniors.

All told, 12 of the top 13 position players are back from the 2005 team that went 38-24-1, extended the program's unmatched streak of consecutive BIG EAST Tournament titles to four and battled through arguably the toughest of the 16 NCAA regional fields before seeing the season end with a loss to eventual College World Series runner-up Florida.

"This is going to be the most experienced team I've ever had and in some ways you could compare it to our 2002 team that went to the College World Series," says 12th-year Notre Dame head coach Paul Mainieri, whose teams own a current streak of reaching six straight NCAA Regional finals (a claim matched by just six other teams in all of Division I baseball).

"One big difference would be that the 2002 team had a couple freshman pitchers leading the staff and that team played with a third-string shortstop for most of the season. This year's team has the added bonus of a veteran three-man rotation and a senior directing the infield at that important position of shortstop."

Notre Dame's 2002 CWS team featured four seniors in the everyday lineup (at catcher, third base, center field and DH) but the 2006 team nearly can match that in the outfield alone, with **Cody Rizzo** in right field, **Alex Netzey** in center and either **Matt Bransfield** or the lefthanded-hitting **Steve Andres** in left (with the one not starting still a top candidate at DH).

The outfield connection extends to first base, as senior **Craig Cooper** has made the shift to the infield where he now plays in the vicinity of his classmate **Greg Lopez**, now in his third season as the starting shortstop.

The six fourth-year position players enter 2006 having combined for a .298 career batting average while appearing in 774 combined games (657 starts), with 694 hits, 499 runs scored, 476 RBI, 258 walks, 118 stolen bases, 103 doubles, 64 home runs and 18 triples.

Mainieri knows all too well that those gaudy numbers don't add up to victories without consistent and clutch performances throughout the lineup.

"We are very experienced but experience alone does not get the job done," says Mainieri. "What we need is for those senior players to play at the highest level in their careers. They need to be great all-around players while helping maintain the great standards of this program."

The Irish took a "trip back to basics" during the 2005 fall season, with the coaching staff reinforcing lessons from days gone by.

"We spent a lot of time drilling the fundamentals, reminding the players about the little things that go into winning," says Mainieri, who enters the 2006 season just 12 wins shy of his 500th coaching victory at Notre Dame (to go along with 819 total wins in 23 previous seasons as a college head coach).

"It was possibly the best fall practice we've had in the past 12 years. I really believe this team is committed to being the best it can be, day in and day out – and that's what it takes to be a champion."

A key fundamental in the offensive game will center on the simple concept of quality at-bats and hitting roles.

"If a player is not going to drive the ball out of the park or drive the gap with authority, then he needs to be a tough out," says Mainieri. "That's going to be the telltale sign of whether we're successful as an offensive team: whether or not guys know their roles and fulfill their roles."

The pitching staff is led by the impressive weekend triumvirate of senior lefthander **Tom Thornton** and junior righthanders **Jeff Manship** and **Jeff Samardzija** – providing a comfortable starting point for many of the games on the horizon. Questions arise when attention turns to the bullpen, due to a combination of: the shaky middle-inning relief put forth during the 2005 season; the departure of former All-America closer Ryan Doherty; and a summer injury suffered by his potential replacement (another junior righthander, **Dan Kapala**), who will miss the entire 2006 season while completing his rehab.

"The front end of the staff is proven but – beyond that – there remain some question marks," says Mainieri. "There still are a lot of roles that need to be answered, most importantly in the late-inning roles, not only the closer but also in the key set-up positions."

Three righthanders had emerged as candidates for the closer role, with freshman **Kyle Weiland** joining sophomores **Tony Langford** and **Joey Williamson** as the potential ninth-inning specialists.

In addition to the senior group, Notre Dame also returns its starting catcher in junior **Sean Gaston** while welcoming back two sophomores in the infield: third baseman **Brett Lilley** and second baseman **Ross Brezovsky**.

Lilley was tabbed for preseason all-BIG EAST honors from both the league coaches and *Baseball America*. The coaches also listed Samardzija and Bransfield on their preseason all-BIG EAST team while *BA* did not forget about Cooper, tabbing the two-time BIG EAST batting champ as its preseason all-BIG EAST first baseman.

Any athletes interested in being two-way players or two-sport performers would feel right at home on the 2006 Notre Dame baseball team, as Langford, freshman infielder **Jeremy Barnes** and junior first baseman/DH **Mike Dury** each are legitimate two-way players while Samardzija (an All-America receiver) and freshman infielder **Evan Sharpley** (a quarterback) are doubling up in 2005-06 as



Craig Cooper

members of the Irish football and baseball squads.

The Notre Dame baseball team has an impressive history of academic success and that tradition continued during the 2005 fall semester, as the team posted a 3.17 team GPA that included 21 of 32 players with a 3.0 or higher (with 10 at 3.4-plus).

Five of the Irish players are leading candidates for 2006 Academic All-America honors, including seniors Thornton (3.54 cumulative GPA), Lopez (3.39) and Bransfield (3.36), plus Gaston (3.36) and Lilley (3.62).

Here's a closer look at the 2006 Irish, sorted by position:

OUTFIELD

Notre Dame's experience starts in the outfield, where the top five options include four of the seniors and junior **Danny Dressman**.

Rizzo (Temecula, Calif.) made 50-plus starts in each of his first three seasons with the Irish, primarily while playing stellar defense in right field. A master at burning the opposition when he gets on base, Rizzo already ranks fourth in Division I baseball history with 70 times hit-by-pitch in his career (the record is 92) but also will be looking to rediscover the hitting consistency that he enjoyed as a freshman, when he finished at .314. A lingering hand injury then limited him to .263 batting in 2004 and the west-coast native failed to bounce back as a junior in '05.

"Cody is such a great baserunner and basestealer – if he gets on base, he finds a way to positively impact a game," says Mainieri, who watched Rizzo overcome his 2005 hitting troubles by getting on base 40-percent of the time, thanks to 37 walks and 21 times hit-by-pitch (plus a team-high 17 stolen bases).

"He has shown flashes of being an outstanding hitter and the key for him will be to be more consistent with the bat."



The deck appeared to be stacked against **Nettey** (Dolton, Ill.) back in the fall of 2002, when he joined the Notre Dame program in a freshman class that was overflowing with outfield prospects. Three years later, Nettey is the clearcut starter in center field and an emerging presence at the plate who hit .288 as a junior. with 11 doubles, 12 stolen bases and 44 runs scored.

"Alex came in here behind a lot of guys and we tried several other centerfielders. However, he kept working hard and then made the most of his opportunity," says Mainieri. "His story is a great one and what I believe college sports are all about – a kid works hard, keeps a great attitude and then takes advantage of his opportunity. He's such a great young man and solid teammate. It's very satisfying when you see kids like Alex succeed."

Bransfield (Englewood, Colo.) played sparingly as a freshman but burst onto the scene as the 2004 team's righthanded DH, launching 12 home runs while leading the Irish with 58 RBI. His junior season began with plenty of promise but Bransfield hurt his hand while making his first swing in the opener, with the injury sidelining him for several weeks and hampering the rest of his season (similar to the affect of Rizzo's wrist injury from the previous season). Bransfield did make a strong return in the summer of '05, earning all-star honors in the prestigious wood-bat Alaska League after batting .312 with 15 doubles and 23 RBI in 39 games with the Mat-Su Miners.

"Matt has worked hard to become a quality outfielder. He knows his main role again, though, will be as one of our top run-producers. He is one of those guys who truly can be a difference-maker over the course of the season," says Mainieri of Bransfield, who ultimately hit .313 in Notre Dame's 2005 season but played in just 32 games (with 16 RBI and no home runs).

Andres (Napa, Calif.) had an impressive first season with the Irish in 2003 – hitting four home runs with 22 RBI as a freshman walk-on – and his lefthanded swing then provided a .320 season batting average in 2004 before seeing a dropoff in consistency during the '05 season.

"Steve has shown a knack for getting big hits and going on hot streaks but – like all our seniors – he will be looking to go out with a more consistent all-around season," says Mainieri. "As one of our key lefthanded power hitters, Steve's production obviously could mean a great deal to our success in 2006."

Dressman (San Jose, Calif.) provides further depth to the 2006 outfield and likely will be a spot starter in right field, notably when Rizzo is inserted behind the plate. Dressman appeared in 81 games during his first two seasons (starting 36) and registered several big plays as both a starter and late-game substitution.

"Danny is a good contact hitter, an effective bunter, and a real steady presence for us in the outfield. It's great to have so many different options as you go through the grind of a 56-game season," says Mainieri.

Freshman **Ryan Connolly** (Binghamton, N.Y.) – who spent most of his prep career as a catcher – will miss the 2006 season after undergoing shoulder labrum surgery in the fall of '05. A spirited player who was destined to join the Irish, Connolly should be squarely in the mix for a starting spot in the outfield when the 2007 season rolls around.

INFIELD

The average age of the Notre Dame infield is considerably younger than the outfield – but the players who reside around the basepaths bring plenty of talent to the table.

The move of Cooper to first base fills the only vacated spot in the Irish defense while also making room in the outfield for Bransfield, thus affording Notre Dame a better chance to field its best offensive team without sacrificing its defensive foundation.

Cooper (Plainview, N.Y.) – who hit .325 overall in 2005, with 7 home runs and 58 RBI – already is one of the most accomplished hitters in BIG EAST Conference history, achieving unique levels of distinction in each of the previous two seasons. As a sophomore in 2004, he became the first player ever to lead the BIG EAST in batting average, slugging percentage and on-base percentage (all during league play). Then, in '05, the hard-swinger righthander repeated his BIG EAST batting title – becoming just the second player to repeat as batting champ in 21 seasons of BIG EAST baseball.

"It's hard to say that somebody like Craig can be so much better but he still has tremendous potential and could be on pace for a huge season," says Mainieri.

"Craig has worked on shortening his swing and should be stinging the ball around the ballpark ever more than he's done in the past."

A talented all-around athlete, Cooper had played a handful of games at first base previously in his baseball career but he quickly has picked up the new position.

"Craig has a lot of range and agility at first base – he's rapidly turning into a strong defensive player to complement Lilley's strong play down the other infield line," says Mainieri.

Brezovsky (Naples, Fla.) opened his freshman season in 2005 as Notre Dame's starting third baseman but ultimately made the midseason flip of positions with his classmate Lilley, who moved from second to third. Despite his change in scenery, Brezovsky continued with the tough first-year adjustment to college baseball – batting .261 with 20 RBI and 35 runs scored.

A challenge then came from the talented newcomer Barnes during 2005 fall practice – but the lefthanded-hitting Brezovsky matched the rookie's effort to maintain his starting spot heading into the 2006 season.

"Ross has improved in all aspects of his game," says Mainieri. "Defensively, he is more consistent and he also is more efficient at the plate – putting the ball in play, becoming a better bunter and getting more walks while lowering his strikeouts."

Lopez (Upper Arlington, Ohio) returns for his final season as the director of the Notre Dame infield unit, lending the same "take-charge" approach to his leadership as he does to routine ground balls. The second-year captain was a third team all-BIG EAST performer in 2004 (when he hit .332 with 14 doubles) but saw his offensive production drop off in '05 (.274, 7 2B) – thus presenting the chance for a rebound season in his farewell.

"This was the first fall that Greg has been fully healthy and he was swinging the bat great all fall," says Mainieri, who may shift Lopez up a few spots into the middle of the batting order.

Lilley (North Canton, Ohio) was held out of summer and fall ball due to a back injury but another season even approaching his rookie effort likely would satisfy most Irish fans. The scrappy lefthander fashioned one of the top seasons ever by a Notre Dame freshman hitter, batting .355 while leading the BIG EAST with a .502 on-base percentage that was just shy of the Notre Dame freshman record.

Lilley's many trots down the first-base line in 2005 included 34 walks and a hit-by-pitch total (30) that ranked fourth in the NCAA record book.

"Brett brings excitement to the game in everything he does and is such a competitor that it's easy to forget he's still one of the youngest players," says Mainieri. "His bat control and instincts for the game just really set Brett apart at this level."

Three freshmen – Barnes, Sharpley and **Eddy Mendiola** – combine with senior **Eddie Smith** to give the Irish possibly their greatest infield depth of the Mainieri era. Barnes, in particular, has the pure ability and versatility to essentially rate as a fifth infield starter, combining surehanded defense and strong ability at the plate as a gap hitter.

"Jeremy could prove to be one of the most valuable players to come into this program in



Alex Nettey





Sean Gaston

a long time – in any other year, he would be starting for us as a freshman infielder but this year we brought back nearly the whole lineup intact," says Mainieri.

Barnes (Garland, Texas) was an all-state shortstop in talent-rich Texas, after batting .430 in the 2005 season. One year earlier, he had compiled a 1.31 season ERA that broke the record at South Garland High School.

"This is a kid who has a bright future in our program, because he can do so many things at a high level," adds Mainieri. "Jeremy is a strong enough hitter that we would use him a lot as a righthanded DH and you also could see him a lot at any of the spots in the infield."

Mendiola (Miami, Fla.) continues Notre Dame's recent ties to the sunshine state, joining the Irish baseball program as one of the nation's top-rated prospects at third base. The newcomer is sure to remind Notre Dame fans of another Miami native, Javi Sanchez, a fan favorite during his days with the Irish. In addition to hailing from the same home area and owning similar physical tools (including a strong arm and solid build), the program's newest Florida native and Sanchez now have yet another bond after Mendiola recently began training as a catcher (in addition to third base).

"Eddy has such wonderful defensive skills at third base but we also are trying to see how he adjusts to catcher," says Mainieri, in reference to his fellow Miami native. "Everyone knows how well things turned out when Javi converted from the infield to catcher so we just hope this will give us more versatility, both this season and in the future."

Sharpley (Marshall, Mich.) – whose 33 career home runs rank sixth in Michigan high school history – will be with the Irish baseball team for the first three weeks of games in the 2006 season, then will shift exclusively to football for a five-week period before rejoining the baseball team in late April. The lefthanded-hitting infielder has played mostly shortstop and third base in his career but he also could see some time as one of the top backups to Cooper at first base.

Smith (Olympia, Wash.) returns for his second season with the Irish and provides even greater depth and college baseball experience for the young Notre Dame infield, after playing two seasons in his home state before lettering with the Irish in the 2005 season.

CATCHER

Gaston (Brownsburg, Ind.) returned to campus on a roll, following a 2005 summer season that saw him earn all-star status in the elite Cape Cod League. The lefthanded-hitting Gaston posted a respectable .287 final batting average in the wood-bat league and was named MVP of the Cotuit Kettleers while getting the chance to work on a daily basis with his classmate Manship, as summer-league teammates.

"Sean's summer did wonders for his confidence – now he knows that he belongs among the best catchers in college baseball and that feeling transfers over into the positive way in which he leads the pitching staff," says Mainieri.

Baseball America's annual conference preview tabbed Gaston as the league "best defensive catcher" and the magazine also cited the Irish leftside infielders (Lopez and Lilley) as the top defensive specialists at their respective positions.

Gaston's backups include Mendiola and three seniors (Rizzo, Andres and Bransfield). Sophomore **Chris Soriano** (Randolph, N.J.) and freshman **Mike Many** (Naperville, Ill.) are newcomers and will assist with valuable bullpen duties, after earning roster spots via fall walk-on tryouts.

DESIGNATED HITTER

Notre Dame's depth even extends to the designated hitter position, with Andres and Bransfield the grizzled veterans in the DH role while each of the two-way players (Dury, Langford and Barnes) can drive the gaps with force and regularity.

The switch-hitting **Dury** – who also has improved his defensive play at first base – could get the chance to showcase his powerful stroke from both sides of the plate, after totaling just 59 at-bats during his first two seasons with the Irish.

Langford (Fort Worth, Texas) firmly established his status as a two-way threat during the 2005 season, batting .283 in 159 at-bats (28 RBI, 7 doubles) while logging 17.1 innings on the mound with a solid 3.63 ERA, a 2-1 record and a big midseason save.

"Tony is one of those guys that just never goes away. You always think there are other players who are better than him – but Tony always does things to keep himself in the mix," says Mainieri.

"It's very evident how much Tony loves to play the game of baseball but he also is a very clutch player who always seems to rise up and hit the ball hard when we need it. He's a free swinger who gets his money's worth, so it's nice to have an option like him at that DH spot."

PITCHING STAFF

Thornton (Middleboro, Mass.) enters his final season as a rare pitcher captain, a testament to his tremendous leadership of the pitching staff and the team as a whole. The consummate student of the game, Thornton was cited by *Baseball America* as the BIG EAST pitcher with the "best command," a claim backed up by his low career average of just 2.1 walks per 9.0 innings.

"Tom is such a tremendous leader for our team and is very clever out there on the mound. It was unfortunate last season that his stats did not reflect his ability, because we often left him out there a bit longer than normal because of the bullpen's struggles," says Mainieri, in reference to Thornton's 6-6 record and 4.69 ERA in 2005 (compared to a 3.74 ERA and 20-9 record for his career).

"Tom has made great progress with commanding his two-seam fastball and now can locate all of his arsenal on a regular basis. He simply was our most consistent pitcher the past three seasons and we expect an awesome final season from him in 2006."

Manship (San Antonio, Texas) was rated college baseball's No. 3 freshman prospect for the 2004 season but he was sidelined by reconstructive elbow surgery. Noted for a devastating curveball that complements a tough fastball, Manship pitched sparingly in 2005 (22.2 innings) while compiling a 3.97 ERA, 2-1 record and twice as many strikeouts (20) as walks (10) – before an impressive summer in the elite Cape Cod League, with the Cotuit Kettleers (2.88 ERA, 3-3, 45 Ks, 15 BB in 50 IP).

"Jeff is 100-percent healthy and ready to solidify his spot in the rotation," says Mainieri. "This is a young man who accomplished a lot in the game of baseball and we all are excited to see him excel during a full college season."

One unique aspect of Notre Dame's three-man rotation is that each could deliver as the No. 1 starter, in the most pressure-packed situation. That certainly applies to Samardzija, who is coming off a consensus All-America season in football after compiling one of the top seasons ever by a Notre Dame receiver.

Samardzija (Valparaiso, Ind.) – who could join Moose Krause (basketball), wrestlers Dick Arrington and Bob Golic, and Raghib "Rocket" Ismail (track) as the fifth Notre Dame football All-American to earn All-America honors in a second sport – has shown marked improvements during each of his seasons with the Irish baseball team while compiling a 3.47 career ERA and 13-4 record. The 6-foot-5, 215-pounder collected Freshman All-America honors in 2004 (after leading the BIG EAST with a 2.95 season ERA) and then went 8-1 with a 3.89 ERA during his sophomore season.

"Jeff's velocity continues to increase and he has developed a straight change that will enhance his pitch arsenal this season," says Mainieri.

"He faces a very unique challenge in not playing summer or fall ball and then trying to shift gears into baseball season while also participating in spring football and



maintaining his studies. Jeff's a very special individual and we're all just glad that he's part of the Notre Dame baseball program - he should be due for another great season."

Kapala (Royal Oak, Mich.) showed during his first two seasons that he could be an elite reliever or top weekend starter, filling the set-up role in 2004 before shifting to the weekend rotation in the middle of the 2005 season. The 6-foot-5, 225-pounder used improved command and development of his slider and changeup to fashion an impressive '05 season that included a 3.20 ERA, 7-3 record, 81.2 innings and a spot on the all-tournament team at the NCAA Gainesville Regional.

As the 2006 season opener approached, the Irish still were evaluating a late-inning relief situation centered around the three righthanders - Langford, Weiland and Williamson - that were mentioned above. Ideally for the Irish, one of the three will emerge as the closer while the other two will fill key setup roles.

"When you look back at our 2004 season, we finished ninth nationally in team ERA," says Mainieri. "That team had some great starting pitchers and an All-America closer but the two setup guys, Joe Thaman from the left side and Dan Kapala on the right, in many ways were so crucial to every game."

Langford's unique delivery produced several key bullpen results in the 2005 season, as the Fort Worth, Texas, native finished with a 2-0 record (one save), a 3.63 ERA and 13 strikeouts in 17.1 innings.

"Tony could emerge as he continues to master the three-quarters arm slot," says Mainieri. "When you are able to throw consistently at that lower slot, you're able to be a tremendous sinker and slider pitcher. If Tony develops in that area, combined with how fearless he is on the mound, he could be a huge boost for the late-inning relief."

Weiland (Albuquerque, N.M.) hails from the same high school as former Notre Dame two-way talent Christian Parker, who has spent the past 10 years in pro ball while also tutoring young pitchers such as Weiland.

A first team all-state performer in 2005, Weiland totaled 53 strikeouts and 19 walks in 35 innings of work for Eldorado High School.

"Kyle has one of the most effortless arm actions of a pitcher that we've seen in a long time - which means he'll continue to pick up velocity as he gets stronger," says Mainieri. "He still is young but has tremendous poise on the mound - we likely will use his tough fastball/change combo in short stints this season."

Williamson (Lantana, Fla.) has become more of a power pitcher during the past few months, including a strong 2005 summer season with the Valley League's Luray (Va.) Wranglers. Despite enduring a tough '05 season with the Irish (he ended with a 6.66 ERA, 1-1 record and 18 Ks in 25.2 innings), Williamson then headed to the Valley and notched an impressive 2.06 summer ERA, with 42 strikeouts and just 20 walks in 39.1 innings.

"Joey has increased his velocity tremendously, pushing his fastball into the low 90s," says Mainieri. "That velocity and his tremendous competitiveness make him a strong candidate for the closer role."

Dury hopes to be joined by one of the above pitchers in the "go-to" setup roles. The 6-foot-5 lefthander delivered several key relief outings in 2005 en route to leading the staff in ERA (1.38), plus better than a 2-to-1 K-to-walk ratio (17-to-7) and more innings pitched (26.0) than hits allowed (25), with a respectable .258 opponent batting average.

"Mike played a very valuable role for our staff last season, by consistently commanding the strike zone with all of his pitches," says Mainieri of Dury, who won his only decision in 24 appearances and delivered both of his saves in clutch postseason situations.

Junior righthander **Jess Stewart** (Manassas, Va.) will be looking to regain the form of his freshman season, when he went 7-1 with a 3.39 ERA as a top midweek starter. Stewart carried that momentum over to the first week of 2005, when he picked up a 4-2 win at Central Florida, but his season was slowed by a knee injury and he ended up logging just 15 total innings in '05.

Sophomore lefthanders **Wade Korpi** (a former prep teammate of Williamson's) and **David Gruener** also return after enduring the typical up-and-down freshman seasons.

Korpi was a regular midweek starter for the Irish a year ago and logged 54.1 innings with a 5.47 ERA and 4-3 record to go along with 32 strikeouts but also 33 walks.

"Wade is one of our most improved pitchers," says Mainieri. "He has regained command of all three pitches and reported in great shape for the upcoming season. All of his hard work has paid off and I think you'll see even more quality results from Wade this year."

The hard-throwing **Gruener** (Gig Harbor, Wash.) - who registered a 5.95 ERA in 19.2 innings in '05 - still holds significant upside and could see more game action in 2006 as he improves the command of his pitches.

Four newcomers on the mound - lefthander **Sam Elam** and righthanders **David Phelps**, **Brett Grafty** and **John Seabaugh** - join Weiland and Barnes as first-year pitchers on the 2006 Irish staff.

Phelps (Hazelwood, Mo.) had a 2.96 career ERA with 14.1 strikeouts per nine innings at Hazelwood High School, where he finetuned an impressive pitching arsenal that has him primed for a strong impact on the college level.

"David had an outstanding fall and has the chance to be one of the leaders of our staff in the future," says Mainieri, who foresees the 6-foot-3, 175-pound Phelps filling a midweek starter or long-relief role.

"He is one of the hardest throwers on the team, with an explosive fastball that he can spot on both sides of the plate to go along with a good breaking ball and changeup."

Barnes' two-way role could remain fluid throughout the season but he brings tremendous value to the mound, as an intense

competitor who consistently can place all three of his pitches around the strike zone.

"One of the great things about Jeremy in a pitching role is that his experience as a middle infielder and quality batter give him an advanced feel for the game," says Mainieri. "That background as a position player allows him to do all the little things on the mound to be a great success."

The 6-foot-4, 200-pound **Elam** (Mesquite, Texas) is a raw talent from the left side who averaged better than two strikeouts per inning over the course of his final two prep seasons. **Grafty** (Joliet, Ill.) went 6-1 with a 3.28 ERA as a junior on the 2004 Joliet Catholic team that was the state runner-up.

"Both of those freshmen can make a big impact," says Mainieri. "Sam is a hard thrower with a big frame. He really showed a bulldog mentality in the fall and able to get out of jams. The key for him is refining some things and getting better command of his pitches."

"Brett is a very athletic pitcher and needs to use that to his strength - but he has the makings of a good fastball/changeup combination pitcher."

Junior newcomer **John Seabaugh** (Granger, Ind.) - a local product and member of Penn High School's '01 state-title team - rounds out the staff as a potential contributor as a fastball/changeup pitcher, after earning a roster spot via the fall walk-on tryouts.



Jeff Samardzija





Sean Stires

Irish Baseball on ESPN 1490 and 1620

For the sixth consecutive season, the Notre Dame baseball program has arranged for a broadcast schedule that will provide commercial-station radio coverage of the entire 56-game regular-season schedule (and all postseason) in 2006, with broadcasts to be provided by South Bend-based ESPN Radio 1490 AM and its sister station 1620.

All radio broadcasts also can be heard live on the internet via real-audio software programs, with a link available on the Notre Dame athletic website (www.und.com).

The Notre Dame athletic department also again will place real-time GameTracker baseball statistics on the website during all 2006 home and select road games.

The primary voice of Irish baseball for the upcoming campaign again is Sean Stires, a 1995 graduate of the University of Kansas who is in his fifth year broadcasting games for several Notre Dame athletic teams as sports director of South Bend-based U93, the parent station of WDND.

Stires has won awards from five different broadcast organizations, including the Communicator Awards' "Crystal Award of Excellence" for his call of the Notre Dame Baseball team's stunning 2002 Super Regional win over top-ranked Florida State to send the Irish to the College World Series. He

also has received broadcast awards from the Kansas Association of Broadcasters, the Colorado Broadcasters Association, the Colorado Associated Press Broadcasters Association and the Indiana Broadcasters Association.

In addition to Notre Dame baseball, Stires' other broadcasting responsibilities include play-by-play duties for the Irish women's basketball broadcasts and various sports call-in shows (including The Official Notre Dame Football and Basketball Coaches Shows). Stires – who was on the call for Notre Dame's 2001 NCAA women's basketball championship run and for the 2002 College World Series season – also can be heard reporting sports on U93's morning program.

Color commentary duties also will be shared by 10th-year Notre Dame baseball sports information director Pete LaFleur, in addition to an assortment of special guests throughout the season.

The tentative schedule will place the majority of the broadcasts on ESPN Radio 1490. Listeners are advised to consult the official Notre Dame website (www.und.com) for any alterations to the broadcast details that may occur during the 2006 season.

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