

# Gator Season

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**N**ow in his third year at the helm of the University of Florida baseball program, head coach Kevin O'Sullivan has engineered a quick turnaround and begun to leave his personal stamp on the Orange and Blue. Following consecutive non-winning seasons prior to his arrival, the Gators have made back-to-back NCAA Tournament appearances and secured a pair of top-three finishes in the always-challenging Southeastern Conference. In addition, UF has shown improvement in the key categories of batting average, earned run average and fielding percentage during both years of his tenure.

Last spring, Florida was 42-22 overall and claimed the SEC's Eastern Division title for the first time since 2005, finishing one game behind LSU and Ole Miss for the league crown. Under the guidance of O'Sullivan and his staff, Craig Bell, Brad Weitzel and Don Norris, UF reached the 40-win plateau for the 18th time in school history, captured the NCAA Gainesville Regional and advanced to Super Regionals for the first time in four years. Falling two victories shy of a trip to Omaha for the NCAA College World Series, the Gators aim to take the next step in their progression in 2010.

Boosted by the return of 20 letterwinners, highlighted by 10 pitchers and five position starters, O'Sullivan and his staff welcomed the nation's top incoming class according to Baseball America and Collegiate Baseball. Ten of the squad's 11 recruits hail from the talent-laden Sunshine State and the group features five pitchers, three infielders, a pair of catchers and an outfielder. Nine of the players achieved all-state recognition during their senior prep seasons and seven members of O'Sullivan's second-straight top-five recruiting haul that were chosen in last June's Major League Baseball Draft decided to come to Gainesville instead of inking professional deals.

Proving the adage of students first, athletes second, 14 members of O'Sullivan's team made either the SEC Academic or SEC Freshman Academic Honor Roll and the team compiled a 3.05 grade point average during the 2009 spring semester. O'Sullivan has also overseen improved player development toward an increased Gator presence in professional baseball. A school-record 10 players, the second-most nationally, were selected in the most recent MLB Draft, while another individual signed a free-agent contract. Twenty-three Florida players have been chosen in the past four years, including nine within the first 12 rounds.

With increased expectations entering the 2010 campaign and hopes to capitalize on the momentum generated by a consensus top-15 final ranking, O'Sullivan and his staff are focused and driven toward enhancing Florida's reputation as one of the nation's elite programs.

## 2010 POSITION ANALYSIS

### CATCHER

The jockeying for the Gators' starting berth behind the plate is a tight race between senior Hampton Tignor, sophomore Ben McMahan and a pair of talented freshmen, Austin Maddox and Mike Zunino. Controlling opponents' running game remains a top priority - foes had a league-low 31



Coach O'Sullivan

stolen bases versus Florida in '09 and the club's catchers tied for fourth in the conference with 27 runners caught stealing.

A three-year letterwinner, Tignor has started 46 of the 89 games he has played in as a Gator and has a career batting average of .272 overall and .284 in SEC play. McMahan saw action in 18 games in his debut collegiate season and gained valuable experience in the prestigious Cape Cod Baseball League last summer by starting 23 games for the regular-season champion Yarmouth-Dennis Red Sox.

A member of Baseball America's 2009 High School All-America Team, Maddox enjoyed a phenomenal career at Eagle's View Academy in Jacksonville, where he led the Warriors to a pair of state titles and four final four appearances in a row. Named the Florida Times-Union's All-First Coast Player of the Year as a senior and a first-team all-state selection three-consecutive years, Maddox hit .544 with 33 RBI and nine homers in his final year at EVA. Chosen by the Tampa Bay Rays last June, he was also a member of the 2008 USA 18-U National Team that claimed the silver medal at the World Youth Championships and on the 2007 USA 16-U National Team which brought home the World Youth Championship. Another first-team all-state catcher hailing from Cape Coral, Fla., Zunino batted .464 and established school records for hits (43), RBI (37) and home runs (12) in helping Mariner High School to the district title. He threw out eight of 20 runners attempting to steal and was picked by the Oakland Athletics in the 2009 MLB Draft.

## INFIELD

One of the trademarks for winning programs is a firm defense that can make dazzling plays look routine. O'Sullivan is hopeful to put together an infield combination that will reduce the number of errors and increase the team's fielding percentage. While junior second baseman Josh Adams and sophomore first baseman Preston Tucker are returning starters, the coaching staff expects junior college transfer Bryson Smith to handle the chores at third base and the pivotal shortstop position to be secured by either of two talented rookies, Cody Dent or Nolan Fontana.

As the first Florida player to collect first-team All-SEC honors in back-to-back seasons since Brad Wilkerson in 1998, Adams looks to continue his outstanding career in the Orange and Blue. He proved that his 2008 Freshman All-American season was not a fluke with team highs in on-base percentage (.440) and walks (40), to go along with a .342 batting average, 58 runs, 52 RBI, 11 doubles and eight dingers. Adams closed last year on a career-best 13-game hitting streak, was named All-Tournament at the NCAA Gainesville Regional after going 4-for-9 (.444) in UF's three wins and was second on the team in SEC play with a .359 effort.

Tucker burst onto the scene with one of the top single-season efforts in school history, let alone by a freshman. He became the first Gator to be named the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association (NCBWA) Freshman Hitter of the Year, shared the SEC Freshman of the Year honor and picked up Freshman All-American recognition from a variety of publications. Tucker earned UF's "Triple Crown" by hitting .364 with a school-record 85 RBI and 15 homers and also paced the team in slugging percentage (.628), total bases (152), multiple-hit (27) and multiple-RBI (23) games. A three-time SEC Freshman of the Week recipient, the Tampa native was the Most Outstanding Player of the NCAA Gainesville Regional, producing a .650 (13-for-20) clip in five NCAA outings and hit .531 (17-for-32) during the postseason.

The 2009 American Baseball Coaches Association's Division I Player of the Year while attending Young Harris College (Ga.), Smith established a school record with a .467 performance and ranked second nationally in RBI (90), third in homers (21) and 13th in on-base percentage (.551) on his way to being a unanimous selection as the Region 17 Player of the Year. The first-team junior college All-American was later a 30th-round pick of the Cleveland Indians.

Newcomers Dent and Fontana each look to make an immediate impact. Dent was a three-time Gold Glove winner and three-time all-county honorable mention recipient at Park Vista (Fla.) High School, while Fontana was third-team all-state as a senior at West Orange (Fla.) High School after hitting .507. He was named All-Tournament at the 2008 World Junior Championships in Edmonton, Alberta, when he batted .357 (10-for-28) out of the leadoff spot with team-highs in runs (12) and walks (nine).

Versatile sophomore Jerico Weitzel played in 55 games for the Gators last year, with 12 starts at second base and three at third base, and senior Jandy Rosabal provides added depth after walking on to the team prior to the 2009 season.

Preston Tucker



## OUTFIELD

Senior center fielder Matt den Dekker, a two-time member of the SEC's All-Defensive Team, anchors a stellar Florida outfield which is also expected to start senior Jonathan Pigott in left and a sophomore in right, either Daniel Pigott or Tyler Thompson.

Entering his third year as a starter after turning down the opportunity to sign with the Pittsburgh Pirates, den Dekker led the Gators with 14 hit-by-pitches and seven sacrifice hits and was second in runs (63), walks (34) and stolen bases (17) en route to an average of .296. He went 2-for-4 and matched his season high by driving in two runs in the victory over Miami (Fla.) in the Regional final and was rewarded with All-Tournament accolades.

The elder Pigott proved to be a spark plug down the stretch for Florida



Josh Adams

## PITCHING

Enhanced competition on the Gator pitching staff, with 10 veterans and seven newcomers, is expected to provide more options for O'Sullivan throughout the season. Despite the departure of two relievers to the professional ranks, 2009 second-team All-SEC pick Billy Bullock and Tony Davis, Florida still returns almost 70 percent of its games started last spring and close to 60 percent of its innings pitched.

A third-round pick of the San Diego Padres in the 2007 MLB Draft, redshirt sophomore Tommy Toledo returns to the mound after missing last year while recovering from a shoulder injury. The right-hander was 4-4 with a 4.40 ERA in 15 appearances and 11 starts as a true freshman, when he worked at least five innings in his first six collegiate starts.

The sophomore trio of right-hander Anthony DeSclafani and left-handers Nick Maronde and Alex Panteliodis stepped into the mix from the get-go for the Orange and Blue last year, each ranking among the team leaders in starts behind Stephen Locke (12). DeSclafani was 6-3 with a 4.98 earned run average over 65 innings as a freshman and kept UF alive at the SEC Tournament with a strong outing against seventh-ranked Ole Miss. He posted regular-season wins over No. 6 Georgia, Alabama and Auburn and totaled 47 strikeouts. In 21 appearances, 11 of which were starts, Maronde led the Gators with 59 strikeouts and limited opponents to a .255 batting average. The southpaw registered a career-high eight K over five innings in the win at No. 3 LSU and appeared in three of UF's five NCAA Tournament contests, with two scoreless stints versus Miami (Fla.) and a start in game two of the Super Regional. Panteliodis matched DeSclafani for the team lead in victories

and was 6-5 with a 4.38 ERA in 22 appearances with 10 starts. He was honored as the SEC's Freshman of the Week in mid-March after stellar efforts against No. 17 Florida State and Tennessee and tied his career best of six strikeouts in the Regional-clinching victory over UM.

Senior righty Jeff Barfield proved to be a versatile performer after his arrival from Lake City C.C., with seven starts in his 16 appearances, a 2-1 mark and a 4.40 ERA. He had 40 strikeouts in 46 innings, with 26 K and just nine walks against league opponents. Fellow right-hander Greg Larson was another welcome addition to O'Sullivan's staff, as he ranked third on Florida with 29 appearances and was 3-2 with a 3.45 ERA in 31.1 innings. The Longwood, Fla., native had two scoreless performances in the Super Regional and held FSU to one hit in 4.1 innings during his collegiate starting debut. Hard-throwing sophomore Justin Poovey is a viable candidate to start or be used out of the bullpen. The righty was 2-1 with a 5.73 ERA in 15 games and drew starts against Eastern Michigan, UCF and Florida Gulf Coast.

Other returnees who figure into the Gators' pitching plan include junior left-hander Kevin Chapman and senior righties Clint Franklin and Chas Spottswood. Taken by the Chicago White Sox in last June's MLB Draft, Chapman made 11 appearances in '09 and kept foes off the scoreboard in eight of those outings. Franklin turned in a 2-0 ledger last season, featuring league wins over Alabama and Tennessee, and held opposing hitters to a .196 average. Spottswood

last spring, batting .333 (12-for-36) during the postseason and finishing with season bests in batting average (.357), RBI (32), runs (31) and homers (six). He earned All-Tournament at the NCAA Gainesville Regional with a .438 effort and was also recognized at the SEC Tourney after belting three round-trippers over UF's three games in Hoover, Ala., featuring two in the elimination-game triumph over No. 7 Ole Miss.

Daniel Pigott saw time in 51 games as a rookie, with 19 starts at designated hitter and 16 in right field, and registered a .301 clip with 28 runs and 21 RBI. Perhaps his most memorable moment of '09 was laying down a game-winning bunt single to cap the Gators' stunning rally from a six-run deficit in the ninth inning to defeat Alabama, 9-8. Thompson appeared in 44 games last season, highlighted by a 4-for-4, three-RBI, three-run outburst against Kentucky that featured both his first career double and homer, as well as a game-winning single in the 11th inning of the opener at No. 6 Georgia.

The Gators possess increased depth in the outfield with the additions of junior Paul Wilson and freshman Kamm Washington. A former member of the Florida football team, Wilson batted .415 with 18 stolen bases as a junior at Lakeland (Fla.) High School before graduating early so that he could enroll at UF in Jan. 2007. Washington earned honorable mention all-state honors at Park Vista High School last spring and was ranked No. 4 among outfielders in the state of Florida.

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saw time in five games and looks to regain the form of his rookie campaign, when he started eight games, the second-highest amount on the squad. The tandem of junior RHP Grant Abadal and Matt Campbell competed for the UF Club Baseball team that captured the 2009 South Atlantic Conference Championship and the duo walked on to the team during the fall workouts.

O'Sullivan is counting on positive contributions from a bevy of highly-touted freshmen hurlers, including Ben Brown (RHP), Michael Heller (RHP), Brian

Johnson (LHP), Hudson Randall (RHP) and Steven Rodriguez (LHP). Brown went 10-1 with a 0.72 ERA at Winter Haven (Fla.) High School en route to first-team all-state recognition and was also the 2009 Lakeland Ledger and Polk County Player of the Year. Rated the No. 3 right-hander in the state of Florida by Prospectswire.com, Heller was taken by the Pittsburgh Pirates last June after garnering honorable mention all-state accolades at Cardinal Mooney High School. Johnson earned first-team all-state honors and tallied 102 strikeouts in 55 innings last season at Cocoa Beach (Fla.) High School before being drafted by the Los Angeles Dodgers. A two-time Louisville Slugger High School All-American from Dunwoody (Ga.) High School, Randall was chosen as the DeKalb County Pitcher of the Year and was later selected by the Kansas City Royals. Another first-team all-state performer from Gulliver Prep in Miami who also gained experience with the 2007 USA 18-U National Team, Rodriguez turned down an opportunity to sign with the Houston Astros to attend Florida.

### SCHEDULE

The Gators' 56-game schedule features 34 games within the friendly confines of McKethan Stadium at Perry Field, where the squad compiled a 30-10 (.750) mark last season. UF has 30 games versus opponents who advanced to the NCAA Tournament, including home series against 2009 College World Series champion LSU and CWS participant Arkansas.

For the 10th-consecutive season, and the 22nd time in 24 years, the Gators will open their season at home, hosting a three-game series against USF from Fri.-Sun., Feb. 19-21. The Bulls were the runners-up in the Big East last year and compiled a 34-25 overall mark. Florida will be tested by the challenging 30-game SEC schedule and will also face traditional Sunshine State rivals Florida State, Miami, Bethune-Cookman, UCF, Florida Atlantic, Florida Gulf Coast, Jacksonville and UNF.

UF will clash with fellow 2009 NCAA Super Regional par-

Jonathan Pigott



ticipant Florida State in four mid-week affairs, meeting the Seminoles in Tampa at George M. Steinbrenner Field as part of the Florida Four Tournament on March 2, hosting the Garnet and Gold on March 16, facing its arch-rivals on March 30 at the Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville and visiting Tallahassee on April 13. The Gators travel to Coral Gables to face Miami for three games over March 5-7. Other national foes who will visit McKethan Stadium include Siena (Feb. 25), La Salle (Feb. 26-28), Illinois State (March 9-10) and Charleston Southern (March 12-14).

The five, three-game SEC home series pit the Gators against Mississippi State (March 19-21), Vanderbilt (April 2-4), Arkansas (April 23-25), defending national and SEC co-champion LSU (April 30-May 2) and Georgia (May 14-16). Florida will open the league schedule in Gainesville on March 19 against Mississippi State and is not slated to face West rival Auburn during the regular season. For the fifth-straight year, the final weekend of the SEC regular season will be contested from Thursday-Saturday to provide an extra day off before the start of the league's tourney.

Stops on the Gators' road itinerary include trips to league co-champion Ole Miss (March 26-28), Tennessee (April 9-11), Kentucky (April 16-18), Alabama (May 7-9) and South Carolina (May 20-22). UF's 2010 schedule boasts 25 games against squads that finished among the top-30 in the final version of the Ratings Percentage Index (RPI).

Florida will be seeking its league-best 30th appearance at the eight-team SEC Tournament at Regions Park in Hoover, Ala., to be held from May 26-30. Following the SEC's postseason event, Florida will be seeking its 26th NCAA Tournament appearance. Regionals will take place at 16 campus sites from June 4-7, followed by the best-of-three Super Regionals spread out among eight venues from June 11-14. UF went 3-0 last spring to sweep the Gainesville Regional, nipping Bethune-Cookman (8-7) and then handling Miami (Fla.) twice (8-2 and 16-5) to advance to the NCAA Super Regional for the third time in school history, all in the past six years. Soon after, the eight survivors will advance to the 64th College World Series at Johnny Rosenblatt Stadium in Omaha, Neb., over June 19-30. UF has reached the CWS five times in school history, most recently in 2005, when it was the national runner-up.