

DRAFT SURVIVORS

LOOK PRIMED FOR 2012 AND BEYOND

By Bill Ballew

Ulcers tend to increase among some of the nation's more prominent collegiate coaches over the course of the summer as they monitor the events surrounding Major League Baseball's annual first-year player draft. A stellar recruiting class can turn to sand overnight if much of the bounty opts to turn pro instead of experiencing what the NCAA diamonds have to offer. The same holds true for a roster filled with juniors and draft-eligible sophomores, which could mean the difference between making a run for one of the eight spots in the College World Series and a season as an also-ran in their respective conference.

"The draft is so hard to predict these days and it's only going to get worse, in my opinion," said TCU head coach Jim Schlossnagle. "Major league teams clearly see the value in investing in the draft and that cost is relative to the huge cost of signing free agents at the major league level. Therefore, it's hard for a college program to compete when Major League Baseball has all of the money and none of the rules. College baseball has all of the rules and none of the money. That's a hard game to win."

For those coaches who emerge from the process with only a scratch or a minor dent on their team's depth chart, chances are they opened fall practice while whistling to work and grinning like a Cheshire cat. Without question there were a handful of teams that emerged as winners before the first pitch of the 2011-12 school year was thrown, including the following 10 schools that should be feeling pretty good about their prospects for next spring.

South Carolina Gamecocks: Most observers ranked the Gamecocks' recruiting class among the nation's top three prior to the draft. Head coach Ray Tanner's team lost a pair of pitchers in the process in Andrew Faulkner and Taylor Guerrieri as well as outfielder Brian Goodwin, a potential transfer from Miami Dade Junior College. A handful of pieces from back-to-back national championship teams also are gone in senior infielders Scott Wingo and Adrian Morales and senior pitcher John Taylor. The two biggest losses could be junior outfielder Jackie Bradley, Jr., who missed much of last spring due to injury, and junior short-stop Peter Mooney.

Offsetting those departures is the somewhat-unexpected returns of All-America pitchers Matt Price and Michael Roth as well as outfielder Adam Matthews and lefthander Tyler Webb. Price, a sixth-round pick of the Arizona Diamondbacks, is one of the top closers in the college ranks, having gone 7-3 with a 1.83 ERA with 20 saves last spring. He posted a 2-0 mark with two saves in five appearances in the CWS to earn a spot on the All-Tournament team. Roth is coming off a season in which he posted a 14-



Matt Price



Michael Roth

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3 record with a 1.06 ERA in 21 outings, including the national championship-clinching finale. Matthews battled a hamstring injury last season while hitting .264, and Webb will look to build on a campaign in which he went 3-1 with a 3.00 ERA, including 2.1 innings of scoreless relief in game one of the championship series in Omaha. Tanner's team also kept significant pieces to its recruiting class when hurlers Evan Beal and Jordan Montgomery and speedy outfielders Tanner English and Shon Carson spurned the overtures of the professional ranks in hopes adding to South Carolina's recent



Greg Larson



Tyler Maloof

success.
Florida Gators: Should the Gamecocks reach Omaha yet again, they could be facing Florida, the team South Carolina upended in the CWS Championship Series. Not unlike the defending national champs, the Gators received a plethora of good news when three of their school-record 11 drafted players decided to return to Gainesville. Head coach Kevin O'Sullivan will once again have the services of second-team All-America outfielder Preston Tucker,



Preston Tucker



Levi Hyams

right-handed pitcher Greg Larson and outfielder Tyler Thompson after all three declined offers to turn pro. Tucker led UF with 74 RBI, 55 runs and 28 walks and equaled the program's single-season standard with 23 doubles. Larson was third on the team with 33 appearances while posting a 2.09 ERA, and Thompson batted .324 in 11 NCAA Tournament contests.

The Gators also retained some key components to what most observers considered to be the best recruiting class in the nation prior to the draft. Infielders Casey Turgeon, a 22nd-round pick of the New York Mets, and Joshua Tobias, a 31st-round selection of the Washington Nationals, opted for college. The same scenario held true for right-handed pitcher John Magliozzi and outfielder/pitcher Ryan

Harris. Magliozzi and Tobias participated in the AFLAC All-American Game, as did fellow Florida newcomers Brandon Sedell, a catcher, and third baseman/outfielder Sean Trent. The new arrivals should contribute to a solid nucleus that helped the Gators win a school-record 53 games in 2011, including reigning Southeastern Conference Player of the Year Mike Zunino, Freshman Pitcher of the Year Karsten Whitson and All-SEC selections Nolan Fontana, Brian Johnson and Hudson Randall.

Georgia Bulldogs: If nothing else, Bulldog head coach Dave Perno deserves credit for perseverance. He has lost a multitude of players in recent years, most tragically the career-ending injuries suffered by Chance Veazey and Johnathan Taylor in



Tyler Beede

each of the past two seasons. Other departures led to a disappointing 2009 campaign and an uphill battle in 2010 while facing the nation's toughest schedule. In the end, Perno's team reached the NCAA Tournament last season by the slightest of margins in between putting together an outstanding recruiting class.

Much of that class is not in Athens, including Dante Bichette, Jr., who signed with the New York Yankees as a supplemental first-round pick, fifth-rounders Patrick Leonard and Matthew Taylor and sixth-round selection Nick Delmonico. The draft also cost the Bulldogs' outfielders Zach Cone and Chase Davidson and pitcher Cecil Tanner. Yet for all that carnage, Georgia considers itself in good shape, with eight starting position players and 11 pitchers who saw action last year back in school. Second baseman Levi Hyams told scouts he would not sign if drafted and returns after leading the team with a .332 batting average. Perno also has righthander Michael Palazzone, a 24th-round draft pick who will look to build on a junior season that saw him post seven wins against ranked opponents. Junior closer Tyler Maloof,

recruiting class, with the primary exception being righthander Jake Junis, who signed with the Kansas City Royals. In addition to Austin, the team is excited about lefthander Carlos Rodon, who throws three above-average pitches for strikes, including a low-90s fastball, and infielder Trea Turner, who is expected to see time on the dirt during his freshman year. In addition to Maynard, the Wolfpack also lost from their roster righthander Cory Mazzoni and first baseman Harold Riggins after they were drafted in the second and seventh rounds, respectively. On the positive side, outfielders Brett



Brett Austin

who ranked third in the nation with 18 saves, also turned down pro ball, as did outfielder Peter Verdin. The survivors from the recruiting class include drafted pitchers Jarrett Brown, Mike Mancuso and David Sosebee along with outfielder Hunter Cole and two-way player Heath Holder.

Vanderbilt Commodores: You might ask how Vandy can be on this list when the Commodores lost 14 players from last year's CWS team, including the weekend rotation of Sonny Gray, Grayson Garvin and Taylor Hill, relievers Navery Moore and Jack Armstrong, third baseman Jason Esposito and outfielder Joe Loftus. Not only that, but the SEC school saw pitcher Kevin Comer, a supplemental first-round draft choice, and 11th-rounder Shawon Dunston, Jr., who was attending school at Vanderbilt this summer, slip through its fingers after being part of the nation's deepest recruiting class. The reason the 'Dores are here is because of the depth. In addition to Tyler Beede deciding to bypass the pros as the highest drafted player not to sign, head coach Tim Corbin welcomed 13 newcomers to Nashville. The class includes lefthander Philip Pfeiffer, who established the Tennessee high school career wins record with 46 while helping guide powerhouse Farragut to four straight state championships. Catcher Chris Harvey decided to forgo his senior year of high school and attend college a year early in order to compete for a starting job instead of enduring the draft process as a high-round pick next June. Connor Castellano is a left-handed-hitting infielder who could start as a freshman, while righthander Drew VerHagen could fill a role in the weekend rotation after pitching for Oklahoma in 2010 and leading Navarro College to the Junior College national championship last spring.

North Carolina State Wolfpack: After Tyler Beede, the highest drafted player that did not sign, was catcher Brett Austin, who was selected 54th overall by the San Diego Padres. Austin decided over the course of the negotiations that he would rather attend school and play for the Wolfpack than accept the lucrative payday that appeared imminent. As a result, North Carolina State has an immediate replacement for Pratt Maynard, who signed as a third-round draft pick. The switch-hitting Austin is expected to be a force in the middle of the Wolfpack lineup while guiding the pitching staff with his solid arm strength and leadership abilities behind the plate. Head coach Elliott Avent also kept most of the other key parts to his



Brett Williams

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Jason Coats



Austin Nola



Tyler Hanover



Williams and John Gianis, who comprised two-thirds of the garden for the Wolfpack in most games, returned to the team after being drafted in the 25th and 26th rounds, respectively.

Texas Christian Horned Frogs: TCU became the darlings of the CWS in 2010 while reaching Omaha in part behind the pitching of freshman Matt Purke. A lingering injury limited his productivity as a sophomore, and the Horned Frogs struggled with their consistency as a result. Now Schlossnagle will have to reload after Purke, eligible for the draft because he had turned 21, decided to take his game to the next level. Among the others departing for the professional ranks include shortstop Taylor Featherston and pitchers Kyle Winkler and Erik Miller.

Aside from those players along with the loss of potential junior college signees Tyler Collins and Cody Anderson, the Frogs did well once the draft deadline to sign came and went. Outfielder Jason Coats decided to return to Fort Worth for his senior season after the Orioles drafted him in the 12th round. Coats batted .325 as a junior and led TCU with 56 RBI. Pitcher Kaleb Merck also opted to remain in college after missing all of last season due to Tommy John surgery. Five members of a strong recruiting class also reached campus, a list that features Kevin Cron, Jerrick Suiter, Derek O'Dell, Kevin Cornelius and Brandon Finnegan. Cron was drafted in the third round by the Seattle Mariners after he broke the Arizona high school career home run record with 59 roundtrippers and is expected to be a force at first base and in the middle of the TCU lineup as a freshman. Suiter, a pitcher, and O'Dell, a third baseman, were courted heavily by Toronto and Boston, respectively, until the deadline expired.

LSU Tigers: The Tigers' difficulties in 2011 centered on pitching. The situation became so dire that the weekend rotation centered on freshmen, which is expected to have long-term positive

ramifications. More help arrived on the mound from the class of newcomers this fall, with four of the five players who were drafted but opted to attend school contributing to the pitching corps. Head coach Paul Mainieri said in his comments that coincided with the opening of fall practice that the new wings "will make a serious impact on our team" while adding he had never had so much pitching depth on one staff. Among those expected to compete for extended activity in their first years include lefthander Cody Glenn and righthanders Carson Baranik and Aaron Nota.

LSU lost three members of its recruiting class, including supplemental first-round pick Trevor Story and sixth-rounder Jake Cave.

Nevertheless, Mainieri welcomed 14 newcomers this fall along with some key returnees who decided to play their senior seasons instead of playing for pay. While the Tigers lost outfielder Mikie Mahtook as well as pitchers Tyler Jones, Matty Ott and Ben Alsup, they retained infielders Austin Nola and Tyler Hanover as well as outfielder/designated hitter Ralph Rhymes. Nola and Hanover have been starters for most of their three years in Baton Rouge and are expected to be the double-play combination once again in 2012. Rhymes, who failed to

make the Tiger roster as a walk-on in 2008, transferred to LSU-Eunice and was named the Junior College Player of the Year before returning to the Tigers in 2011. He ranked second on the team with a .360 batting average and tied for second with 42 RBI before turning down the Pirates as a 40th-round draft pick this past summer.

Mississippi Rebels: The Rebels have done a good job of remaining competitive in the ultra-tough SEC by focusing their recruiting efforts on a combination of junior college transfers and high school players who were not likely to be drafted. That philosophy has changed recently under head coach Mike Bianco and recruiting coordinator Carl Lafferty. Ole Miss decided to shoot for the stars by garnering commitments from as many premier players as possible while hoping the lure of attending school in Oxford presented enough of a gravitational pull to snag a couple on an annual basis.

Suffice it to say the philosophy worked in a big way this summer. The Rebels believe they may have hit the mother lode when nine of their 11 drafted newcomers decided to wear the red and blue. Topping the chart is center fielder Senquez Golson, who was flown to Boston on the final days prior to the deadline to negotiate with the Red Sox but turned down a reported seven-figure signing bonus. While Golson is currently playing for the Rebel football team as a corner back, Bianco believes the outfielder with an impressive combination of speed and power will make immediate contributions as well on the diamond.

Shortstop Jake Overbey is also expected to play as a freshman after he was courted by the Philadelphia Phillies as a 10th-round pick. Big things are also expected from pitchers Hawtin Buchanan and Josh Laxer, who were drafted by the Washington Nationals in the 19th and 20th rounds, respectively, but will instead help a young but promising group of Rebels in 2012.

North Carolina Tar Heels: The Tar Heels emerged relatively unscathed from the draft process in terms of both their recruiting class and returning players. Head coach Mike Fox knew he would lose three seniors from last year's CWS team in Friday night starter and 13-game winner Patrick Johnson as well as Greg Holt and Jesse Wierzbicki. Fox also understood the odds of shortstop Levi Michael returning were not good; he wound up signing with the Minnesota Twins as a first-round draft choice. The incoming class of freshmen suffered only three losses to the professional ranks in righthander Bryan Brickhouse, a third-round pick of the Kansas City Royals, Dillon Maples, another righty who signed with the Chicago Cubs after going in the 14th round and lefthander Chris O'Brien.

While three losses hurt the Heels' depth, the team still emerged with most of its top 10 recruiting class intact, including drafted shortstops Josh Ake and Zac LeNeve and pitchers Adam Griffin and Chris McCue. What's more, catcher Jacob Stallings opted to return for his senior season instead of signing with Cincinnati as a 42nd-round pick. Stallings is an excellent defender who can help shut down an opponent's running game with his excellent arm strength. He was also North Carolina's third-best hitter with a .292 batting average. The Tar Heels also have returning their top two hitters from this past spring in sophomore third baseman Colin Moran, who was named

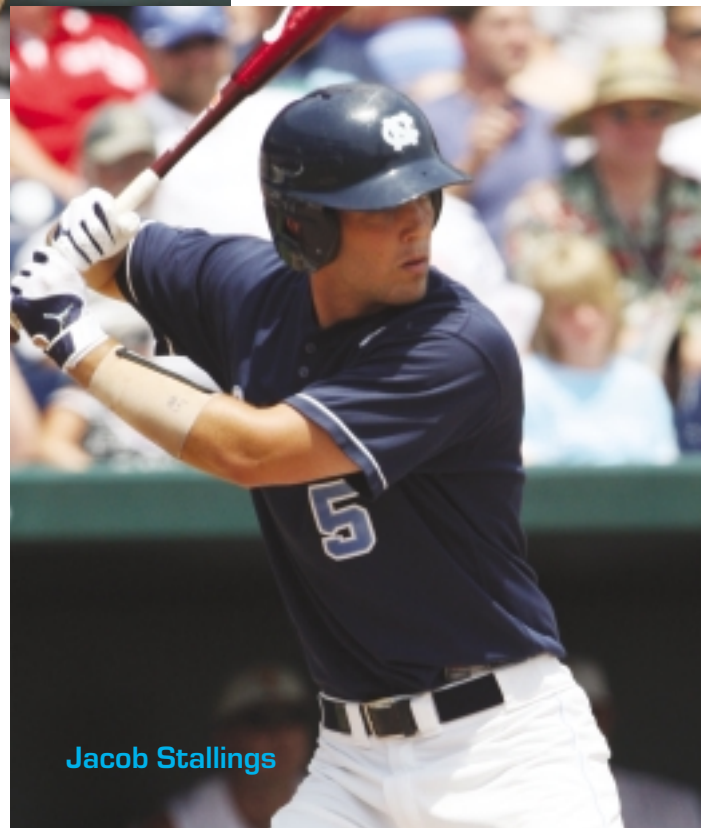


Colin Moran

the top prospect in the Cape Cod League this summer, and Tommy Coyle, who is coming off a .311 season in which he drove in 36 runs.

Southern Mississippi Golden Eagles: Shortstop B.A. Vollmuth, who was instrumental in the Golden Eagles' trip to the CWS in 2009, became the highest drafted player at USM in eight years when he was selected in the third round by the Oakland Athletics. While Vollmuth signed with the A's just prior to the deadline in mid-August, head coach Scott Berry was able to breathe a little easier when Connor Barron, who was taken three picks before Vollmuth in the draft, decided to turn down offers from the Florida Marlins in order to become the heir apparent at short. Barron blossomed physically as a senior at Sumrall High School in Mississippi and displays all of the attributes scouts love, including raw power at the plate and a strong arm with soft hands on defense.

The draft also cost the Golden Eagles pitcher Todd McInnis and closer Collin Cargill as well as senior outfielder Tyler Koelling. The future, however, looks bright in Hattiesburg. In addition to Barron, USM retained three other potential impact players in outfielder Mason Robbins, third baseman Brad Roney and right-handed hurler Taylor Nunez. Robbins, a 20th-round pick of the New York Mets, is projected to be a two-way player in college and possesses a potent swing from the left side of the plate. Roney, the Baltimore Orioles' 18th-round selection, is a strong candidate to start at third base as a freshman, thereby giving the Golden Eagles a tremendous left side of the infield for the foreseeable future. Nunez, taken by the Pirates in the 19th round, could see some mid-week starts during his initial campaign on campus and looks to be part of the weekend rotation at some point during his collegiate career.



Jacob Stallings