

NEWPORT GULLS BASEBALL

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"RAISING THE BAR IN SUMMER COLLEGIATE BASEBALL"

Familiar faces set to return as Gulls' infield takes shape

NEWPORT, R.I. – A couple of Rhode Island natives will help serve as the defensive backbone up the middle as the infield takes shape for the Newport Gulls this summer.

Middle infielder **Matt Bouchard** [East Greenwich, R.I.] and catcher **Matt Ianetta** [Providence, R.I.] both return for a second season in the New England Collegiate Baseball League. Coupled with the arrivals of several players from top-flight programs around the country, their return makes for a talented crew at the plate and in the field.

Bouchard - who started 38 of the 39 games he played for the Gulls last season - is a middle infielder who can hit leadoff and No. 2 in the order. Last summer he batted .294 for the Gulls, scoring a team-high 29 runs while sporting a .359 on-base percentage. After a slow start, he batted .368 over his final 17 games in Newport, ending the regular season on a six-game hitting streak. A junior at Georgetown University, he has been a .300 hitter all season for the Hoyas.

Brandon May [Roswell, Ga.] is a slick-fielding infielder who locked up a starting job as a true freshman at the University of Alabama this spring. Playing mostly at second base for the Tide, May had a .969 fielding percentage and a .281 batting average through May 6. **David Cunningham** [Roswell, Ga.] was a medical red shirt for Auburn University this spring. Considered a top-100 prospect by *Baseball America* in 2006, he is expected to be healthy for the Gulls this summer.

"Our infield will be strong defensively and offensively. We are getting very good players from some very strong programs," Gulls General Manager Chuck Paiva said. "Matt Bouchard is returning and was the starting shortstop in last summer's NECBL All-Star Game. Brandon May has played a lot as a true freshman at Alabama with success, and Dave Cunningham is a highly touted middle infielder at Auburn. Both Cunningham and May played together in the East Cobb baseball program in Atlanta, Georgia so they know each other already."

At the hot corner, **Darin Holcomb** [Spokane, Wash.] comes to the Gulls from Gonzaga University, where he has been the Bulldogs top hitter this season. A two-time all-West Coast Conference team member, Holcomb is hitting .365 with 13 doubles and six home runs through 51 games this spring. Fellow Bulldog **Ryan Wiegand** [San Diego, Calif.] has been a starting first basemen/designated hitter for the last two years. Wiegand brings a power presence from the left side of the plate, and has hit .324 with six home runs and 39 runs batted as Gonzaga's cleanup hitter thus far.

Brad French [Brentwood, Tenn.] has been the starting first baseman for No. 1-ranked Vanderbilt this spring. Depending on the Boilermakers' success in the NCAA tournament, his arrival in Newport could be delayed. He will give the Gulls a strong defensive presence, whether at a corner infield spot or in the outfield. Lefty **Gerry Spessard** [Hagerstown, Md.] is a first baseman at the University of Maryland, where he has been a key cog in the middle of the order. He can also play in the outfield.

"This infield will provide great flexibility for Coach [Mike] Coombs and it will be very exciting to watch this much talent play together this summer," Paiva said.

Behind the plate, the Gulls will be strong with Ianetta and Texas Christian University product **Hunt Woodruff** [Dallas, Texas]. Ianetta, the starter at Georgetown, had a perfect fielding percentage in the 16 games (13 starts) he had last summer in Newport. Adept at throwing out would-be base stealers, Ianetta struck out just three times in 46 at bats last summer. Woodruff has been a regular starter for Texas Christian, where he is hitting .320 this spring.

Be sure to check back on Friday for a look at the Gulls' outfielders for the 2007 season.

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