

# COACH'S CORNER

## HOW THE FIREBIRDS ROSTER IS DETERMINED

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After seventeen summers in Orleans, this is the question people ask me the most. There is no short, easy answer. Some people think the league holds a draft.

Others believe the Firebirds' "front office" puts our team together. Neither of these is true. The fact is, the roster selection is entirely our coaching staff's and my responsibility, with input from many. While it is a lot of fun, assembling the roster is, without question, a manager's biggest challenge.

To steal a line from our legendary 1980 USA Olympic hockey coach, Herb Brooks, we are looking for the "right" guys to play in Orleans. We want elite talent, but more importantly, we are looking for young men who have great character and who will represent themselves, their universities, their families, Orleans, and the Cape Cod Baseball league in an exemplary manner. There are over 300 Division I schools alone; add D2, D3, and junior college players, and there are a lot of players from which to choose.

So, how does it all get started? The initial contact I have with a player is most likely with a prospective player's college coach calling me. They want to get their players in the right developmental environment during the summer. So conversations are held about our needs, and how their players might fit our needs. Those conversations, along with information we receive on players from scouts, agents, and summer league coaches from around the country, help us develop a solid list from which to choose. Prospective players will even contact me themselves. With all of this information, we assemble a roster that will normally consist of fifteen pitchers and fifteen position players.

This being summer eighteen in Orleans, I have developed some solid relationships with different programs and people over the years. For instance, Jason Gill, the Head Coach at Loyola Marymount University, was a big reason that I wound up in Orleans, so I will always try to make room for his players. He is a tremendous coach and a great friend, and I had the honor and privilege of coaching with "Gilly" at LMU in 1999 and 2000. I also had the honor and privilege of having Robert Woodard, the pitching coach at North Carolina, and Mike Clement, a current assistant at Ole Miss, on our coaching staffs in Orleans, so our roster will normally have Tar Heels and/or Rebels on it. We will also have at least a couple of "Vandy Boys" on our roster, as well. This summer we have four, the maximum you can have from one college program. I met Tim Corbin, Vanderbilt's Head Coach, when he was an assistant with the USA Team back in 2000, and we have remained close friends ever since. I also have a long-standing relationship with Duke, dating back to 2007, when Nate Freiman became the first Blue Devil to play for us. Carmen Carcone, the former Orleans manager who preceded me, who now scouts internationally for the Florida Marlins, is extremely helpful with roster input. And I would be completely remiss if I didn't mention Alex Levitt, the current Director of Player Development at Vanderbilt. Alex also worked for the 'Birds a few summers back, and we fondly call him our "Orleans Scouting Director." I can't even begin to tell you how

many hours he and I have spent on the phone discussing players. Even Miss Donna, my fiancée and USC alum, will get her two cents in with roster choices. She loves it when we have a Trojan in Orleans.

Work on the roster is never complete. It is a year-round process with names of potential players arriving via phone calls, texts, and emails constantly. Our team for this summer was pretty much set by the end of last summer, as is normally the case. We are allowed a 30-man roster, and after those players have been selected, there are still challenges. Invites to the USA Team go out, players get injured, pitchers get shut down, and teams advance to the Super-Regionals and the College World Series in Omaha. All of this does not transpire until late May or early June, so this time period can be pretty hectic. We acquire "temporary" players to fill the spots of our "contracted" players that will not arrive in time for the start of the season. It has the feeling of doing a big Sudoku puzzle daily until all the "numbers" fit in the right spaces. It also gives me a feeling of what it must be like to be a Major League Baseball general manager and the challenges that are faced on a daily basis.

As I write this in April, we are already looking at potential 'Birds for the summer of 2019. Texts, emails, and phone calls are continuous. Player evaluation is ongoing, and the team is being put together. So, if you know a quality young man that is also an elite collegiate player, shoot me an email at knicholson@loyolahs.edu. I promise to get back to you. ○