

NOTRE DAME ANNOUNCES ANOTHER TALENTED CLASS, SIGNING SIX PREP SENIORS IN 2003 FALL PERIOD
Signees include two righthanded and two lefthanded pitchers, plus pair of lefthanded-hitting infielders.

Notre Dame Baseball Signees – Fall 2003

Player	Pos.	Ht./Wt.	Bats	Hometown	High School
Ross Brezovsky	IF	5-10/160	L	Naples, FL	Barron Collier
David Gruener	LHP	6-1/200		Gig Harbor, WA	Life Christian
Wade Korpi	LHP	5-11/180		Lake Worth, FL	Santaluces
Tony Langford	RHP/IF	6-0/175	R	Fort Worth, TX	Fort Worth Country Day
Brett Lilley	IF	5-9/165	L	North Canton, OH	Hoover
Joey Williamson	RHP	6-2/185		Lantana, FL	Santaluces

The Notre Dame baseball program has inked six highly-regarded high school seniors to national letters of intent during the 2003 early signing period, head coach Paul Mainieri announced today. The signees include righthanded pitchers **Tony Langford** (Fort Worth, Texas) and **Joey Williamson** (Lantana, Fla.), lefthanders **David Gruener** (Gig Harbor, Wash.) and **Wade Korpi** (Lake Worth, Fla.), and the lefthanded-hitting infield duo of **Ross Brezovsky** (Naples, Fla.) and **Brett Lilley** (North Canton, Ohio).

The 6-foot, 175-pound Langford also is an accomplished two-way player who could see time in the infield, batting .338 and scoring 24 runs during his junior season to go along with a 2.25 ERA, 6-2 record and 67 strikeouts in 47 innings.

The 5-11, 180-pound Korpi and 6-2, 185-pound Williamson both attend Santaluces High School, becoming the first teammates to sign with the Irish in the 10-year Mainieri era. Korpi posted a 1.06 ERA and 14.5 Ks per nine innings on the 2003 Santaluces squad while Williamson checked in with a 1.35 ERA and 18.0 Ks per nine innings.

Notre Dame is set to lose six players to graduation after the 2004 season, in addition to the annual possibility of losing members of the junior class as high-round Major League draft picks. The senior class includes three regulars – All-America second baseman Steve Sollmann, catcher Javi Sanchez and lefthanded pitcher/first baseman Joe Thaman – plus lefthanded reliever Cody Wilkins and reserve infielders Zach Sisko and Tim Murray.

Four of the signees – the 5-10, 160-pound Brezovsky (a .425 hitter as a junior), the 6-1, 200-pound southpaw Gruener (1.75 summer ERA) and prep teammates Korpi and Williamson – have been included on the Perfect Game/Baseball America list of the nation's top prospects, with Williamson also starring for the 2002 United States Youth National Team.

Williamson (31st), Korpi (45th) and Brezovsky (65th) are ranked by PG/BA among the top players in talent-rich Florida, with Gruener ranked ninth among players from Washington and Langford 71st in Texas (each per PG/BA). *The Buckeye Scout* has rated the 5-9, 165-pound Lilley as the top second-base prospect in the state of Ohio (and among the state's top-10 overall prospects), after setting a record at Canton Central Catholic High School with his .483 career batting average (he currently is attending Hoover High School for his senior year).

"We have continued to attract athletes who can succeed at the highest level and this group of signees fulfills our needs with players who have outstanding ability while also being 'great fits' for Notre Dame," says Mainieri, whose 2004 squad is one of just four in the nation with multiple classes that previously have been ranked by *Baseball America* among its top-six recruiting classes (the current Irish juniors were the No. 1-rated class in '02 while the current Notre Dame freshmen recently were rated sixth).

"It was vital to sign four athletic pitchers who regularly throw multiple pitches for strikes, who have the ability to stop baserunners and who possess the competitive nature to want the ball when the game is on the line. As a bonus, Tony Langford's talent as a two-way player will give us an option of helping the team as a position player," adds Mainieri, who has guided his last five Irish teams to the NCAAs, including a trip to the 2002 College World Series and 144 total wins over the past three seasons (sixth-most in all of Division I baseball during that span).

"In order to win championships, we need players who put their heart and soul into every aspect of the game – and Brezovsky and Lilley are the type who play the game the right way. They meet our goal of landing a pair of top-notch infielders who swing from the left side and stand out as hard-nosed gamers. Each will bring a lot of energy and enthusiasm to the program."

The signing of Williamson, Korpi and Brezovsky continues a recent trend that has seen 12 Floridians play for the Irish during the Mainieri era, with that group including current players Sanchez, junior righthanded pinching ace Chris Niesel, sophomore outfielder Brennan Grogan and freshman lefthander Matt Whittington.

Langford could become the fifth Texan to pitch for the Irish in the Mainieri era (others include current junior Tyler Jones and freshman Jeff Manship) while Gruener could be Notre Dame's latest in a Seattle-area pipeline that has produced switch-hitting outfielder Allen Greene, All-America infielder Brant Ust and all-conference outfielder Kris Billmaier. Lilley is slated to become the latest Ohio product to star for the Irish, with others including brothers Scott and Steve Sollmann, All-America centerfielder Steve Stanley, third baseman Andrew Bushey, catcher Paul O'Toole and DH Matt Bok (plus current sophomore shortstop Greg Lopez).

Mainieri was quick to praise his assistant coaches, second-year recruiting coordinator David Grewe and recent addition Terry Rooney (who previously served as the recruiting coordinator at Stetson).

"David and Terry are one of the great young recruiting tandems in college baseball, and their organization and hard work was instrumental in our recruiting success," says Mainieri, whose first nine years at Notre Dame have included a 100-percent graduation rate among four-year players (53-of-53, plus eight other early-signs who have returned to graduate), a group of 37 players who have been drafted or signed free-agent contracts and the continuation of the nation's third-longest streak of seasons with 40-plus wins (15)

"I also continue to believe that our best recruiters are our current players, who give a great deal of their time to educate the prospects (while they are visiting campus) about the special qualities of our university and our baseball program."

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BREZOVSKY – rated among the nation's top 400 prospects and 65th in Florida (per PG/BA) – led Barron Collier High School with a .425 batting average as a junior before an impressive 2003 summer with the Central Florida Renegades (one of Florida's elite under-18 teams), batting a team-best .354 and making just six errors in 61 games. He also earned second team all-state honors as a junior, after posting a .546 on-base percentage, five triples, 41 runs scored and 16 stolen bases – and also serving as the closer – for the BCHS's 2003 regional runner-up squad that finished 26-7. He hit .352 as a sophomore (21 RBI, 14 stolen bases) while converting 9-of-10 save chances and was the only freshman on the 2001 varsity squad, batting .310 as a starter with 15 RBI and 12 SBs. A 4.2 GPA student, he has been named to the top prospect team at the Perfect Game showcase in Fort Myers and has been selected for the recent Diamond Club Showcase that features the top seniors in the state of Florida.

MAINIERI ON BREZOVSKY: "Ross brings a tremendous attitude and love for the game, with the athletic ability and skills to play multiple infield positions. He has great hustle and baseball instincts and is a very polished all-around player. Ross has good bat control with tremendous bat speed and his lefthanded swing is quick, compact and smooth, producing some pop in his bat. A boost in strength will help his development and power as a college hitter."

BREZOVSKY ON HIS DECISION: "I felt that I fit in best at Notre Dame. The players on the team, the atmosphere, the school spirit, the academics and athletics – everything is great. I made my visit the weekend of the Washington State game and Cody Rizzo was my host player. I was born in New York but have lived in Florida for the last eight years. Cody is from southern California but he told me the change in weather is no big deal, especially when you are getting four years of a great education and being able to play baseball at Notre Dame."

GRUENER – rated among the nation's top 300 prospects and ninth in Washington (per PG/BA) – is coming off a strong 2003 summer season with the Riptide Baseball Club, posting a 1.75 ERA and 66 strikeouts in 68 innings pitched (plus 24 walks and 71 hits allowed). His junior season at Life Christian School included a 1.96 ERA and nearly a 9-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio (42/5) in 25 innings of league play. He has participated in the 2002 Junior Olympics (Tucson), the 2003 Area Code Games (Long Beach) and the 2003 Silver Glove Showcase (Houston) while being rated the No. 5 pitcher at the 2003 Stanford All-Star Camp. The honor-roll student also was listed 11th in Baseball Northwest's 2002 fall rankings for Washington's top 2004 prospects.

MAINIERI ON GRUENER: "David stands out as a very projectable lefthander with great arm strength. He went from throwing mid-80s in the summer to high-80s & low-90s this past fall. David is a very difficult matchup for left-handed hitters, due to his low arm-slot, and he has the ability to be a dominant college pitcher."

GRUENER ON HIS DECISION: "I had an awesome visit during the Florida State football-game weekend and my hosts were Cody Rizzo and Mike Dury. The one thing that really got me was the unity of the team – you could tell that they really cared about each other and were good friends, beyond the baseball team. And that's how the whole school is, it's not just limited to the team. I also liked the idea of having a structured and disciplined environment. I've also heard some great things about coach Rooney, that he's a very hands-on type of coach who can help you fix your mechanics."

KORPI – rated among the nation's top 250 prospects and 45th in Florida (per PG/BA) – averaged 14.5 strikeouts per nine innings while posting a 1.06 ERA and 4-1 record during his junior season at Santaluces High School (63 Ks, 39 IP), earning all-conference and honorable mention all-area honors with that '03 squad that was ranked No. 1 in the state of Florida. His all-conference sophomore season included a 1.45 ERA, 4-3 record and 73 Ks in 53 innings. He also was a top member of the Florida Bombers summer-league team, pitching 4.1 innings of relief in the title game as the Bombers won the 2003 World Wood Bat Association's senior-division national championship (that team also won the Connie Mack state title). The lefthander has played in Cuba three times, most recently in the summer of '03 when he struck out 15 batters and allowed just two hits in nine shutouts innings vs. the Cuban under-18 national team. He also recently was one of nine pitchers selected to represent the elite *Baseball America* team at the Perfect Game World Wood Bat Championship in Jupiter, Fla., and he currently ranks academically among the top five-percent of his class.

MAINIERI ON KORPI: "Wade is one of the top lefthanded pitchers in the southern United States and has great pitchability, in that he is an extremely smart pitcher who knows how to set up hitters and put them away. His demeanor and mound presence separates him from most pitchers his age and he has shown the ability and confidence to throw three pitches for strikes in any count."

KORPI ON HIS DECISION: "I came up for my visit during the Michigan State weekend and Matt Whittington was my host. My visit was awesome and really helped make the decision easier. Just seeing the campus and realizing all the history, and the players and coaches were really nice as well. It's also amazing how a degree from Notre Dame can help you later on, out in the business world. The baseball team also is one of the top programs and is on the verge of winning the College World Series, so I'm excited to be a part of all of it."

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LANGFORD – PG/BA's No. 71 prospect for the state of Texas – is coached at Fort Worth Country Day High School and with the summer-league Arlington Wizards by former big leaguer Cecil Espy, who spent parts of eight seasons in the Major Leagues with the Cincinnati Reds, Texas Rangers, Pittsburgh Pirates (including the '91 and '92 playoff teams) and the L.A. Dodgers. Known as a talented middle infielder and big-game pitcher, Langford's fastball recently has touched 92 mph while his 2003 summer highlights included striking out six batters in five shutout innings vs. the potent Midwest Prospects team (based in Missouri) before racking up 11 Ks in six no-hit, shutout innings versus the Austin-based Advanced Baseball Academy squad at the World Wood Bat National Championships in East Cobb, Ga. He was a first team all-area selection at FWCDHS as a junior, after going 6-2 on the mound with a 2.25 ERA, two saves, a .211 opponent batting avg., 67 Ks, 13 walks and 32 hits allowed in 47.2 innings while also batting .338 with a team-best 24 runs scored (plus 10 RBI, 4 triples, 5 doubles and 9 stolen bases). He hit .422 with the Wizards during the summer of '02, adding 24 runs scored, 12 stolen bases, 14 RBI and nine extra-base hits (two triples, seven doubles). Langford also lettered in football as a sophomore and junior, ranking as his conference's leading passer in 2002. An honor-roll student and student ambassador, he was named the Fort Worth area's outstanding Hispanic youth leader of 2003 and hails from the same high school as former Irish outfielder and '91 team captain Edwin Hartwell.

MAINIERI ON LANGFORD: "Tony attended our fall baseball camp and stood out with great arm strength (touching 91 mph) and tremendous athletic ability. He is a very intriguing pitcher, with different arm angles that create deceptiveness in his delivery. His athleticism and ability to play other positions also gives us options in intrasquad games."

LANGFORD ON HIS DECISION: "I came in during the USC weekend and was hosted by Javi Sanchez, Steve Sollmann and Grant Johnson. One of the main things about Notre Dame is the high-quality combination of academics and the athletics. I also really liked the sense of community among the players and felt very welcome on my visit. I know I'll be coming into a very strong athletic department, but feeling comfortable and accepted was a key thing. I really liked the family environment between all the players and coaches."

LILLEY – rated by *The Buckeye Scout* among Ohio's top-10 prospects (first among 2B) – owns the Canton Central Catholic High School record for career batting avg. (.483), including .486 as a sophomore and .469 as a junior (first team all-state both seasons). He also set the CCCHS record for batting average by a freshman (.495, 50-for-101), earning all-district honors while helping the 2001 squad go 24-5 and qualify for the regional tournament. He then played at second base on the 2002 district runner-up team (18-7) and was the starting shortstop on the '03 squad that went 32-2 and advanced to the state-title game (he set a state record in '03 with 19 times hit-by-pitch). An honor-roll student (4.47 GPA) and member of the National Honor Roll Society, Lilley also is ranked third among Ohio placekickers in addition to playing as a wide receiver and kick returner for the Hoover ('00 season) and CCCHS ('01-'03 seasons) football teams. His 33-yard field goal in the waning seconds sent the 2001 regional-title game into overtime, with the LeBron James-led St. Vincent-St. Mary team winning in OT. His father Bill Lilley is an assistant sports editor at the *Akron Beacon-Journal* while his sister is a star shortstop for the Purdue softball team (she was named the Boilermakers' '02-'03 freshman female student-athlete of the year).

Jeff Fisher (of the Buckeye Scout) on Lilley: "Brett Lilley is one of Ohio's most exciting, game-action prospects. Always on base, his fireplug attitude puts demanding pressure on opposing defenses, His knowledge of the strike zone, ability to bunt and strong baserunning skills will give the Irish an immediate candidate for the leadoff spot. An active middle infielder with commendable defensive tools, Lilley has earned the rank as Ohio's top 2B prospect by TBS and is ranked among Ohio's top 10 overall prospects."

MAINIERI ON LILLEY: "Brett brings many positive qualities to the field, as a leadoff hitter with an advanced approach at the plate and the ability to bunt for a hit and hit for high average. He has great baserunning instincts and plays the game hard, with controlled intensity. Brett will add speed to the lineup and toughness in the field."

LILLEY ON HIS DECISION: "I was very comfortable on my visit and really liked the coaches. I visited on the USC football weekend and stayed with Greg Lopez. I really like the fact that I will have the opportunity to play and the school as a whole is just amazing, with so much tradition. The school atmosphere beats any I've ever seen. ... I think that players from Ohio can compete with anyone in the country, there just aren't as many as us as from some other states."

WILLIAMSON – rated among the nation's top 150 prospects and 31st in Florida (per PG/BA) – has been enjoying a breakthrough 2003 fall season, allowing just one run and one walk in six outings at various showcase events (spanning 25 innings). He recently rang up 10 strikeouts in a five-inning stint vs. the Puerto Rico select national team, allowing two hits and one walk in that game while competing with the West Palm Beach Yellow Jackets at a Perfect Game showcase. He also has been competing this fall at MLB Pro Scouts Diamond Showcase events, after starring with Team Florida USA during the summer and earning an invitation to the U.S. Junior National Team tryouts in Joplin, Mo. (he was one of a handful of 17-year-olds invited, with current Irish freshmen Jeff Manship, Chris Vasami and Jess Stewart also at the trials). His junior-year stats (in limited time on the mound) included a 1.35 ERA, 2-0 record, two saves and 50 strikeouts in 25 innings for state's top-ranked team, while also playing first base. As one of two 15-year olds on the 2002 U.S. Youth National Team, Williamson trained with the elite national program during the summer of '02 and helped the team finish second at the Pan Am Games in Barquisimeto, Venezuela – tossing 6.2 shutout innings to get the win vs. the Dominican Republic, in a semifinal elimination game. He was named all-tournament at the prestigious Westminster National High School Invitational during 2003 spring break (in Fort Lauderdale), after tossing five shutout innings and batting over .300 with a pair of home runs.

MAINIERI ON WILLIAMSON: "Joey has the physical ability to be a dominant pitcher at the college level, due to his development of consistent mechanics and playing experience at high levels of competition. He can spot his fastball in the high-80s and low-90s, with movement on both sides of the plate, can throw his changeup when behind in the count – and shows the makings of a tremendous out pitch with his nasty slider."

WILLIAMSON ON HIS DECISION: "I stayed with another Florida player, Chris Niesel, on my visit over the Michigan State football weekend and I really liked the feeling and the atmosphere of the campus. The combination of great academics and athletics sealed the deal. Chris is from south Florida and he said the difference in climate had no bearing on him. I knew coach Rooney when he was at Stetson and think he will be a great fit and will help the pitchers a lot. The fact that Notre Dame is able to be so successful as a northern baseball program helped make it all a perfect fit for me."