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NOTRE DAME BASEBALL FRESHMAN CLASS RANKED NO. 6 IN NATION BY BASEBALL AMERICA
Irish join elite company with second highly-regarded freshman class in the past three years.

For the second time in the last three years, *Baseball America* has placed Notre Dame on its list of college baseball's top-12 freshman classes – with the current Irish freshmen checking in at sixth on the list of top recruiting classes for the 2004 season. Notre Dame joins just three other teams – Stanford, Georgia Tech and Arizona State – that have produced two of *BA's* top-six freshman classes in the past three seasons (no team has been in the top six all three years). Notre Dame's current juniors comprised *Baseball America's* No. 1 freshman class for the 2002 season.

The 10 letter-of-intent signees in Notre Dame's 2004 freshman class include four righthanded pitchers – 6-foot, 170-pound **Jeff Manship** (San Antonio, Texas), 6-3, 210 **Derek Olvey** (Pelham, Ala.), 6-5, 195 **Dan Kapala** (Royal Oak, Mich.) and 6-4, 210 **Jess Stewart** (Manassas, Va.) – plus one of the nation's premier utility players in 6-4, 210-pound first baseman/outfielder/righthander **Chris Vasami** (Mamaroneck, N.Y.), 6-1, 185 infielder **Chris Fournier** (Fairfield, Conn.), 6-4, 210 first baseman **Mike Dury** (Indianapolis), 6-1, 175 catcher **Sean Gaston** (Brownsburg, Ind.), 5-9, 160 centerfielder **Danny Dressman** (San Jose, Calif.) and 6-1, 190 lefthanded pitcher **Matt Whittington** (Melbourne, Fla.). Gaston and Dressman are lefthanded hitters while Dury is an accomplished batter from both sides of the plate – with the signees hailing from nine different states.

The class is headlined by three high school All-Americans – Manship, Olvey and Vasami – while Fournier and Kapala were named to their respective ABCA All-Region teams and were Gatorade state player-of-the-year recipients. Vasami also was the New York AA player of the year and Gaston the runner-up for Indiana's Mr. Baseball Award.

Four of the signees were ranked among the nation's top-100 high school players by either the Perfect Game/*Baseball America* "Prospects Plus" (first number) or by Team One Baseball: Manship (6th/18th), Olvey (58th/86th), Dury (277th/37th) and Vasami (100th/NR), with Dury the top-rated first baseman on the Team One list. Fournier (225) and Stewart (269) were included on PG/*BA's* list of the top 300 prep players.

Perfect Game/*BA* also ranked eight of the nine Irish signees among the top-11 players in their respective states, led by four – Manship, Olvey, Vasami and Fournier – who were rated first in their state (Kapala was No. 2 in Michigan, Dury and Gaston 6th and 9th, respectively, in Indiana, and Stewart 11th in Virginia).

The Team One ratings cited Fournier (10th) and Vasami (14th) among the nation's "best pure hitters" while projecting Dury as the No. 4 "best pure hitter for the future", among prep players who were draft-eligible in 2003. Vasami drew more specific praise, ranking seventh for "best raw power" and 10th for "best linedrive power" (Fournier was 9th in linedrive power). Vasami was one of just two players in the nation who were included among Team One's top 15 for each of the pure hitting, raw power and linedrive power categories. Vasami also could combine with Manship and Olvey as one of the nation's top-rated trios of freshman pitchers in 2004 (Manship was the second pitcher listed on the PG/*BA* lists while Olvey was 32nd and Vasami was listed as the 53rd pitcher).

The recruiting effort for head coach **Paul Mainieri's** Irish baseball program was led in 2002-03 by recruiting coordinator/assistant coach **David Grewe** and former Notre Dame associate head coach **Brian O'Connor** (now the head coach at Virginia). First-year Notre Dame assistant coach **Terry Rooney** – who replaced O'Connor as the Notre Dame pitching coach – also was recognized by *Baseball America*, after serving as the recruiting coordinator that landed the nation's 12th-ranked class on the *BA* list (at Stetson).

The five position players combined to bat .507 during their senior seasons, also combining for 179 RBI, 118 walks, 54 doubles and 37 home runs. The seven pitchers averaged a 1.08 senior-year ERA while combining for a 64-13 record, 777 strikeouts, just 166 walks and 253 hits allowed in 480 innings – with a 4.7 combined strikeout-to-walk ratio and combined nine-inning averages of 14.6 strikeouts, 3.1 walks and 4.7 hits allowed.

Three fathers of the Irish freshmen – John Manship (Arizona), John Dury (North Carolina State) and Ralph Vasami (NYU) – played college baseball while Stewart's grandfather Jack Stewart was one of the top pitchers on the 1945 Notre Dame baseball team.

The 2004 squad must replace the void left by the 2003 graduating class that included starting centerfielder Kris Billmaier, reserve first baseman Mike Holba and five regular members of the pitching staff (closer J.P. Gagne, starters Ryan Kalita and Peter Ogilvie, and relievers Matt Laird and Brandon Vilorio).

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Notre Dame Baseball 2004 Freshman Class					
Player	Pos.	Ht./Wt.	Bats	Hometown	Previous School
Danny Dressman	OF	5-9/160	L	San Jose, CA	Archbishop Mitty HS
Mike Dury	1B/OF/LHP	6-4/210	S	Indianapolis, IN	Bishop Chatard HS
Chris Fournier	IF	6-1/185	R	Fairfield, CT	Fairfield HS
Sean Gaston	C	6-1/175	L	Brownsburg, IN	Brownsburg HS
Dan Kapala	RHP	6-5/195		Royal Oak, MI	Shrine Catholic HS
Jeff Manship	RHP	6-0/170		San Antonio, TX	Reagan HS
Derek Olvey	RHP	6-3/210		Pelham, AL	Pelham HS
Jess Stewart	RHP	6-4/210		Manassas, VA	Osborn City HS
Chris Vasami	1B/OF/RHP	6-4/210	R	Mamaroneck, NY	Mamaroneck HS
Matt Whittington	LHP	6-1/190		Melbourne, FL	Melbourne Central Catholic HS

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WHAT THEY'VE SAID ABOUT THE NOTRE DAME BASEBALL 2004 FRESHMAN CLASS

(quote provided Nov. 16, 2002, from Jeff Spelman, editor TeamOneBaseball.com):

"Notre Dame again has signed one of the best classes in the nation and it's an incredibly-balanced group, with speed, power, good arms and defense at several key areas – I'd certainly grade this class an 'A' ... The centerpiece of the class is Jeff Manship. He could prove to be one of the top-10 players in the country and has the best curveball out there. He is very polished and could make an immediate impact, as could Derik Olvey ... We have three of these signees ranked among the nation's top hitters, with those players being Dury, Vasami and Fournier – who is a kid that can flat-out hit and is very competitive. And it's true that Dressman will remind people of Steve Stanley at the same age. ... If you add these signees to the (veteran) pitchers at Notre Dame, you could envision them back in Omaha (at the '04 CWS) – because you'd have weekday starters who would be weekend starters at most other top-20 programs. ... Notre Dame really turned the corner with making it to Omaha (in '02) and there is nothing they can't offer a recruit now. What is exciting to see is that they are maintaining things on a high level and building on it – they are not a 'flash-in-the-pan.' They've done a great job of identifying kids early on who are good fits for Notre Dame."

Manship – brother of current Stanford pitcher Matt Manship and a former summer-league teammate of Irish shortstop Greg Lopez on the Ohio Thunder – was one of the top pitchers for the 2003 U.S. Junior National Team and was rated by some scouting services as having the best curveball by a high school prospect in the last 15 years. He was listed 13th by *Baseball America* in an earlier projected 2003 mock amateur draft (with that mock draft including '03 college players) but he slipped to the 50th round of the 2003 Major League Draft due to his strong commitment to attend Notre Dame.

His senior season at Reagan High School included a 0.64 ERA, 13-1 record and nearly two strikeouts per inning (133 Ks in 77 IP), plus just 18 walks and 33 hits allowed (only one home run). He earned All-America honors in each of his final two high school seasons, with his combined stats from '02 and '03 including a 0.65 seven-inning ERA (0.83 for nine innings), a 22-2 record and four no-hitters (one a perfect game), plus a 7.9 strikeout-to-walk ratio and nine-inning averages of 17.4 strikeouts, 2.2 walks and 7.9 hits allowed. Manship's two starts with Team USA at the 2003 Junior Pan Am Cup included a 0.84 ERA and 1-0 record in 10.2 innings, with 20 strikeouts, five walks and six hits allowed. His dominant outing versus the host team from Curacao included 15 Ks in seven innings of that 10-1 victory.

Olvey – who elected to join the Irish despite being a 13th-round draft choice of the Los Angeles Dodgers – turned in a senior season that included a 1.50 ERA, 9-1 record, 93 strikeouts, 11 walks and 36 hits allowed in 70 innings for the Pelham High School squad that earned a No. 3 national ranking. Known for his mound presence and a fastball that has touched 94 miles-per-hour, Olvey's combined stats in his final two prep seasons included a 1.16 seven-inning ERA (1.49 for nine innings) and 18-3 record, plus an eye-popping 11.6 K-to-walk ratio and nine-inning averages of 13.5 strikeouts, 1.2 walks and 5.1 hits allowed. He ranked third in his high school class with a 4.2 GPA and could become the second letterwinner from Alabama in Notre Dame baseball history.

Vasami – known for his bat speed, power to all fields and a heavy, hard fastball that tops out in the low 90s– set school records at Mamaroneck High School for career hits (120), career strikeouts thrown (233), and strikeouts thrown in a game (17) while batting .540 as a senior for the 2003 sectional champs (with eight home runs, 30 RBI, 13 doubles, 27 walks and 15 times hit-by-pitch). He also posted a 10-1 record in 2003, with a 0.67 ERA, 120 strikeouts, 20 walks and 3 hits allowed in 62 innings.

Vasami's gaudy offensive numbers included a .523 batting average and 87 RBI over the course of his final three prep seasons, a 1.200 slugging percentage as a junior and .950 slugging as a senior (plus a .900 on-base pct. in '03), and a team-record .525 batting average with the 2001 Long Island Tigers wooden-bat summer team. He also hit 7-for-14 with a home run, triple and three doubles at the 2003 U.S. Junior National Team Tryouts and sent a pitch from Manship into the rightfield corner for an opposite-field double in the 2003 All-America All-Star Game.

Fournier – noted for his poise and advanced hitting approach, gap-to-gap force and tremendous mechanics – was a .514 career batter (.410-plus in each season) as a shortstop at Fairfield High School, leading the team to a second consecutive state title in 2003 while setting the team record for season batting average (.671), plus 30 walks, 42 RBI, 20 doubles and three home runs.

Kapala (a 47th-round Seattle Mariners draft pick) racked up 318 strikeouts during his final two seasons at Shrine Catholic High School, including 193 in 93 innings as a leading member of the 2003 state runner-up squad (for an average of 2.1 Ks per inning, plus a 1.05 ERA and 11-4 record in '03). Known for his arm strength and a deceptively low arm angle that produces enormous movement and sink on his low-90s fastball, Kapala's other two-year stats over the 2002 and '03 seasons included a 0.83 seven-inning ERA (1.07 for nine innings), a 20-6 record, 117 walks and 46 hits allowed in 161.2 innings – for a 2.7 K-to-walk ratio and nine-inning averages of 17.7 strikeouts, 6.5 walks and 2.6 hits allowed.

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Gaston – known for his receiving mechanics, arm strength and lefthanded offensive production – finished as the runner-up for the 2003 Indiana Mr. Baseball Award, after batting .478 with eight home runs, eight triples, 35 runs scored and stellar defensive play with Brownsburg High School's state runner-up squad. He owns Brownsburg career records for doubles (31), fielding percentage (.933) and games played (113) while ranking second with a .453 career batting average and throwing out 78-percent of attempted basestealers during the 2002 spring and summer seasons (opponents attempted to steal versus him just six times in '03, with only one being successful). Also a 4.0 honors student, Gaston was a 50th-round Chicago White Sox draft pick and was Dury's roommate with the summer-league Indiana Bulls team that won the 2001 national title.

Stewart – who joined Manship and Vasami at the 2003 Junior National Team tryouts – was an all-conference performer for the 2003 Osbourn City High School team that was ranked 24th nationally, posting a 1.44 ERA, 6-3 record, 90 strikeouts, 12 walks and 51 hits allowed in 63 innings. Noted for throwing a very heavy fastball with a lot of sink and movement to go along with low-90s velocity, Stewart's stats during his final two prep seasons included a 2.31 seven-inning ERA (2.98 for nine innings), a 14-4 record, 148 strikeouts, 40 walks and 98 hits allowed in 121.1 innings – with a 3.7 K-to-walk ratio and nine-inning averages of 11.0 strikeouts, 3.0 walks and 7.3 hits allowed.

Dury was the 2002-03 Indianapolis area athlete of the year, after helping his Bishop Chatard High School teams post a 58-6 combined record (with state titles in football and basketball). The 3.95 honors student also earned the state's prestigious Mental Attitude Awards for both football (with 2,000-plus passing yards, 25 touchdowns and just two interceptions) and basketball and was an all-state selection in football and baseball, after batting .420 with 10 home runs and 37 RBI. He also was 8-1 on the mound on the mound with Chatard in '03 while playing for former Notre Dame pitcher Mike Harmon, adding a 1.08 ERA and an unheard-of 15.4 strikeout-to-walk ratio (77/5), plus 28 hits allowed in 52 innings.

Dury's combined stats in his final two prep baseball seasons included a .396 batting average, 14 home runs, 70 RBI, a 1.60 seven-inning ERA (2.06 over nine innings), a 13-3 record, 132 Ks, 24 walks and 74 hits allowed in 100.2 innings – with a 5.5 K-to-walk ratio and nine-inning averages of 11.9 strikeouts, 2.2 walks and 6.6 hits allowed. He 15-strikeout effort and go-ahead double led Chatard to its third straight city title in 2003.

A finalist for the 2002 Indiana Mr. Football Award, Dury ended his football career with a 23-game winning streak (including two state title-game wins over Andrean) and then averaged 10 points per game in the 2002-03 basketball season – earning all-state tournament honors after scoring a team-best 18 points and adding 10 rebounds in the title game vs. Fort Wayne Elmhurst.

Dressman's all-state season as the cleanup hitter with Bishop Mitty High School's 2003 sectional championship team included a .402 batting average with 40 RBI, 29 runs, 15-of-15 stolen bases, 21 walks, 14 extra-base hits (8 HR, 2 3B, 8 2B) and just one error in the field – plus 99 career RBI (second in the Mitty record book) and countless highlight-reel defensive plays in center field. Known for his all-around level of play, 6.7 speed in the 60-yard dash and great baseball instincts, Dressman was a .414 career hitter – including a rare team MVP season as a freshman (.524, 6 HR, 32 RBI).

His primetime performances have included batting 3-for-4 with three RBI, a home run, double and five no-hit innings on the mound versus Foothill in the 2003 semifinals at the prestigious West Coast Classic national tournament, adding three more RBI, a triple and single in the 7-5 loss to Mater Dei in the final. He also had a 4-for-4 game with two home runs in the final of the annual Lions Club Tournament. Also a three-year basketball point guard and versatile football star, Dressman was named the state utility player of the year in football as a junior (playing as a quarterback, defensive back and receiver) and finished as Mitty's career leader in receiving yards.

Whittington – whose father Mike Whittington was a linebacker on Notre Dame's 1977 national-title team – earned all-state honors at Melbourne Central Catholic, after leading Broward County with a 1.24 ERA in 2003, plus a 7-2 record, 71 strikeouts, 21 walks and 44 hits allowed in 62.2 innings. A finesse lefthander with a projectable frame and loose arm, Whittington is known for his athleticism, competitiveness and ability to throw three pitches for strikes. He posted a 2.14 career ERA and 21-9 record as a four-year starter, with 170 strikeouts, 68 walks and 192 hits allowed in 215.1 career innings – for a 2.5 K-to-walk ratio and nine-inning averages of 7.1 strikeouts, 2.8 walks and 8.0 hits allowed. He also was a two-sport star as a football quarterback and graduated with a 3.9 GPA.

LINKS FOR EARLIER UND.COM RELEASES AND QUOTES ABOUT THE 2004 FRESHMAN CLASS:

Paul Mainieri 2003 Fall Practice Comments: <http://und.ocsn.com/sports/m-basebl/spec-rel/100503aaa.html>

2002 Fall Signees Release: <http://und.ocsn.com/sports/m-basebl/spec-rel/111602aaa.html>

2003 Spring Signee Release: <http://und.ocsn.com/sports/m-basebl/spec-rel/061503aaa.html>