



Baseball Magic Look to ‘Miracle Lefty Tandem’

By all rights, neither one of the STLCC-Meramec’s top two starting pitchers should be on the mound. When sophomore **Jason Nicholas** (Warrenton, MO) blew out his elbow in the spring of 2006 as a prep senior, it looked like the scholarship he had already signed with Meramec would be destined for his scrapbook of memories.

But, the tenacious lefthander underwent the most serious surgery a pitcher can risk his future on - the last resort Tommy John operation where a tendon or ligament is taken from another part of the body and used to replace the damaged one in the throwing elbow. The recovery, if it even happens, usually takes a year or more.

Thus, it was no surprise that Nicholas wasn’t full speed in 2008, posting less than representative numbers that the imposing, 6’2”, 230 lb. hurler was used to. But, that was then and this is now for the fully recovered lefty. And, his focus is on the team and off his left elbow.

“I see a lot of potential, I see a good team atmosphere and a team that’s going to work hard to get the job done,” said Nicholas. “We want to win, that’s the number one goal, we want to win.”

Seventh year head coach **Tony Dattoli** could see the determination in Nicholas since the moment he was injured nearly three years ago.

“You could kind of see the fire was burning in him,” said Dattoli. “He wouldn’t let the injury deter him from doing what he wanted to do. I’m sure he has a dream of playing professional baseball at some point.”

Another pitcher with dreams is 6’5” sophomore **Michael Schrader** (St. Charles West). Schrader, also a lefthander, has had an even more unique route to the pitching mound. Throughout youth and high school baseball he was an outfielder known for his bat. Last season, as a freshman at Wabash Valley, an experiment transformed him into a pitcher for the first time in his career.

“Last year in college they saw my size and my arm strength and said we’re going to give this a go,” said Schrader.

But, it was a short-lived gamble as Wabash Valley never saw the transformation through to fruition, instead using Schrader sparingly. That's when Dattoli and local pitching guru Lance Sherman, Meramec alum, stepped up to the plate.

“Lance Sherman, he really sat down with me this season and got a lot of things straightened out,” said Schrader. “I give any kind of success and credibility this season to that man and the coaching staff here at Meramec. They definitely brought me in, made me feel at home, made me feel that I'm an important part of the staff and I really thank coach Dattoli for that, as well as for bringing me in here and giving me a chance.”

The result has been not only much improved mechanics, but potential so great that Dattoli helped land Schrader a scholarship for next season at NCAA Division I St. Louis University, unheard of for someone with no real mound time to date. His potential, though, is what has scouts excited.

“A lot of scouts have said that I'm still raw,” said Schrader, “and that's where they see the projectability issues come in where they say ‘he's been pitching for two years, what will he be like in four or five?’”

The Magic hope the time is now for the 2009 edition of the team, as they'll battle with Nicholas and Schrader through a loaded conference and regional slate of opponents like Crowder and Jefferson Colleges. The two lefties will be joined by another pair of hurlers with college experience in **Dallas Tew** (Scott City, MO) and **Jeremy Boyce** (Cardinal Ritter). They'll be augmented by transfers **Mitch Kohnen** (Duchesne) out of Missouri State and **Dave Williams** (Maplewood) from Central Missouri State University.

Sophomore **Kevin Mahler** (Mehlville), who prematurely ended his season last year with an injury, will also be used primarily as a pitcher, giving Meramec seven arms with college experience.

The rest of the starting lineup will be a mix of sophomores and freshmen with strong hitting **Ryan Humphry** (Blytheville, AR) leading off and playing center field. Much heralded **Justin Wilson** (St. Charles West), a freshman, will bat second.

Another freshman, **Brett Nelson** from Owensville, MO, will play first base and hit third. “He brings a sense of leadership, he's older than what his class says,” said Dattoli. Hitting clean up is sophomore **Nick Berding** (Affton) who can swing with power.

Two more veterans fill the fifth and sixth slots in **Mike Gumm** (St. Charles) and catcher **Monty Cooper** (Sullivan.) Cooper knows how to win - he took his high school squad at Sullivan to a pair of state title games.

C.J. Ingram (McCluer North) will fill the seven hole as a freshman outfielder, while a pair of shortstops will platoon as the eight hitter in **Michael King** (Independence, MO) and **Kason Koelsch** (Cassville, MO.) Hitting ninth will be a quasi leadoff man in third baseman **Jerry Roam** (Francis Howell North) given his ability at the plate.

“Pitching and defense will be much stronger from last year and most importantly I think we’re going to be quite an offensive team,” said Dattoli. “We’re going to be able to run and steal a lot of bases, spray the ball around the infield. We’re not going to hit a lot of home runs but we’re going to make for some exciting baseball.”

The Magic open the season locally at Southwestern Illinois College at 2pm. on Thursday, Mar. 5 before their home opener a day later against Elgin, IL at 2 p.m. Both those events are single nine inning games.

Meramec’s Freese Keeps Hopes Alive for Redbird Roster Spot

In the hunt for a starting spot at third base for the St. Louis Cardinals in place of injured Troy Glaus, former Meramec player **David Freese** (Lafayette) is nursing his own injury. It was recently disclosed that Freese injured his foot in a Jan. 10 car accident and the injury has slowed him in the early days of spring training.

However, manager **Tony LaRussa** has stated publicly that he considers Freese a strong frontrunner for the third base job, despite the setback. Glaus is expected to be out through April, and perhaps longer following off-season shoulder surgery in January.

Freese played for Meramec in the 2003 and ‘04 seasons, enjoying a stellar year in ‘04. That year he was the Region XVI Player of the Year as well as a first team All-American.

Men’s Basketball Heads To Post Season as Region XVI Top Seed

Hoping to put an exclamation point on a fine season with their first Region XVI title in four years, the men’s basketball team opens tournament play on Friday (Mar. 6) in a 5 p.m. semi-final game against STLCC-Forest Park. The tourney will be played at Westminster College in Fulton, MO.

The Magic come in with 22 wins (22-8), their most in a season since their third place national finish in 2005 (28-8). Meramec defeated the pesky Forest Park Highlanders twice this year by scores of 90-68 and 80-66.

If Meramec can outlast the “Park” on Friday, the likely title game opponent the next day (2 p.m.) would be perennial powerhouse Penn Valley (Kansas City), a regional tournament thorn in Meramec’s side more often than not. Penn Valley is ranked fourth nationally with its 25-4 record and has been second ranked much of the season.

“We toughened up, we had some bad moments early in the year, we should have won some more games, couldn’t hold onto leads,” said coach **Randy Albrecht** of the team’s metamorphosis. “We’ve matured some, we’ve gotten a little stronger with the ball, we’re getting to know each other better.”

The Magic have split with Penn Valley this season, losing a 78-60 decision on the road to the Scouts in a game that saw Meramec sport a 17 point halftime lead and absolutely collapse in the

second half, getting outscored 54-19. But, the Magic made Friday the 13th a lucky one for themselves two weeks ago when freshman center **Dallis Johnson** (Lafayette) tipped in the game-winner at the buzzer for a 79-77 home victory.

“It’s a really big win because we let one slip away earlier in the year and we got them back. I think we’ll be ready for them in the regionals,” said sophomore guard **Drew Moore** (Northwest.)

Meramec has size and a strong inside game with the 6’5” Johnson, 6’5” guard **Rodney Ford** (Affton), and 6’4” freshman reserve **John Alexander** (Oakville) who has been a stellar sixth man as a strong rebounder.

Acting as a floor field general for two seasons is guard **Alonzo Wrickerson** (Webster Groves) who has averaged three assists a game. Wrickerson is quick and unselfish to find an open man rather than take the shot himself. Sophomore guard **Eddie White** (Parkway West) has also played an enormous role in the team’s success both as a scorer and a rebounder. An example of that was his performance over Lewis and Clark Feb. 25 where he poured in 24 points to go with seven boards.

Ironically, Meramec has defeated Penn Valley for the Region XVI championship in all odd numbered years of this decade, with the exception of 2007 where Meramec was eliminated in the semi-final game by Forest Park. But, in 2001, 2003, and 2005 the Magic downed the Scouts and advanced to the national tourney.

The road to nationals has since changed in that the Region XVI winner must now play a one game District playoff against a regional champ from the state of Kansas. This year, the Magic would host that game on Tuesday, Mar. 10. That winner would then advance to the NJCAA National Tournament Mar. 18-21 in Danville, IL.

Magic Bow Out In Region XVI Semi-Final to North Central

In the rubber match of the season, the Magic women’s basketball team saw their season end in the Region XVI semi-final at North Central, falling to the Pirates 72-51. Just thirteen days earlier, Meramec had downed visiting North Central 76-60. The home floor edge seemed to dictate the season’s play between the two squads.

In the loss, freshman forward **Latavia Doss** (Francis Howell) led the scoring with 15 points, while freshman guard **Suelin Tang** (Trinidad, Tobago) added 10 points. Tang had emerged during the late season with considerable improvement in her play.

The defeat ends the Magic’s season at 16-16 and the coaching tenure of seventh year head coach **Steve Jarvis**, who will be succeeded by full time P.E. Instructor **Shelly Ethridge** next season. Jarvis, who finishes with a career mark of 105-117, saw his high point in the 2005-’06 season where the team had a 21-12 and won its first Region XVI crown since 1977 (there was no women’s basketball team between 1979 and 1997.)

Several strong players helped power the Magic this past season such as sophomore captain and three point specialist **Capri Savage** (Orofino, ID), forward **Aretasha Barry** (Hazelwood East) who was a skilled scorer and rebounded, the aforementioned Doss, and 6' sophomore center/forward **Cynthia Abernathy** (Timberland), a strong scorer with a near unstoppable turnaround jumper in the paint.

Savage was named to the All-Conference first team, while Barry and Doss won honorable mention status on the squad.

Ashton Whitehurst (Francis Howell North) also was in double figures scoring in many games and contributed strongly to the team's wins.

2 Grapplers Win All-American Honors at National Tourney

A pair of Meramec wrestlers won the coveted All-American status at the NJCAA National Tournament Feb. 27-28 in Rochester, Minnesota. For one of them, it was his second All-American honor in a row.

Narrowly missing his chance to win a second straight national championship at 141 lbs., **Aaron Senzee** (Kearney, MO) took a second place medal, losing in the championship bout 5-3 to Jeremy McCoy of Ellsworth (IA) College.

Senzee finishes his Meramec career with one national title and two All-American medals. And he also captured the Joseph Rockenbach Sportsmanship Award, given to only one wrestler at the mega-event.

Also capturing an All-American honor is **T.T. Prayther** (N. Myrtle Beach, SC) at 125 lbs.

Meramec won thirteenth place as a team among NJCAA Division I programs. They had qualified nine of ten weight classes for the tourney and amassed 33.5 team points during the two day event.

David Mirikitani to Enter Kirkwood High Hall of Fame

Meramec volunteer assistant wrestling coach **David Mirikitani** will be inducted into the Kirkwood High School Hall Of Fame in ceremonies Mar. 14 at the school. Mirikitani will be one of 26 inductees honored along with one entire team.

David graduated Kirkwood High in 1988 and wrestled there, winning three state championships.