

EAST JUNIATA BASEBALL

East Juniata looks for return to District 4 playoffs

By **DEREK MAJOR***Sentinel sports reporter*

dmajor@lewistownsentinel.com

COCOLAMUS — East Juniata's first-year baseball coach, Tim Brubaker, isn't being modest about his team's intentions this season.

"Our goal is to make districts and to be competitive in the Tri-Valley League," he said. "The team has been excellent as far as attitude, outlook and work ethic the first two weeks. Our senior players are directing it and they're doing a lot of good things with the younger guys and the confidence is coming. We plan on building on what we did last year."

Last year the Tigers dropped out of the District 4 tournament early — and they lost three important players to graduation from last season.

"Zach Yetter led the staff in wins and was TVL MVP and was the ace of our staff,"

Brubaker said. "Anthony Shipe caught every game for us last year, and was a leader on the field, Shane Erickson

was a great defensive shortstop for us last year and he was another leader for us and made things a lot of things happen with his speed on the bases."

With those key contributors gone from last season, Brubaker will be relying on some guys to step up this season and he'll also have some new guys jumping up from the JV squad this season.

"We're looking a lot to our seniors Kyle Pannebaker and Tyler Inch," Brubaker said. "They've been four year starters. We also have Zak Plesce, a lefthanded senior pitcher that we're hoping will produce for us. A couple other seniors have come out who played for us last year and we hope to get contributions out of Tanner Truitt as well as



Sentinel photo by BRADLEY KREITZER

Members of the East Juniata baseball team are, from left, front, Cole Snyder, Nick Heister, Kyle Pannebaker, Tyler Inch, Nick Lorenz, Dillion Leonard and Jeremy Pannebaker; back, Logan Hambright, Jessie Watts, Ryan Stuck, Bailey Coder, Tanner Truitt, Zak Plesce, Garrett Kauffman and Christian Searer.

AT A GLANCE**EAST JUNIATA
TIGERS**

District 4, Class AA

Coach: Tim Brubaker, assisted by Matt Pannebaker, Donny Troupe, Brian Hart and Scott Plesce
2011: 13-6, 7-5 Tri-Valley League

Garrett Kauffman and Christian Searer. Nick Heister is also a senior and he'll be playing center field for us.

"Bailey Coder, Jesse Watts, Dylan Leonard, Cole Snyder, Nic Starr, Logan Hambright, and Jeremy Pannebaker," Brubaker said, rattling off the names of players who will be

mostly new to varsity this year. "They're all going to be playing with the varsity team this season."

At the Tigers' first scrimmage Brubaker was pleasantly surprised by some of the things he saw from his team.

"We were able to put different players at different positions and we now we know we're able to move some guys around and still be able to stay competitive," Brubaker said. "Our pitching was a bit surprising in the fact that we were able to throw strikes consistently. Also, it was the first time we saw live pitching this season and we were able to put the bat on the ball a few times, but we got some walks as and a hit batter as well, so it's good to see the

guys being patient at the plate and making the opposing pitcher throw a lot of pitches early."

While the Tigers have high aspirations this season Brubaker knows that reaching those goals won't come without hard work, dedication and improvement.

"Right now the biggest thing we're working on is our pitchers," Brubaker said. "Throwing strikes with what they're saying about the bats being down this year with a new style bat — we need to throw strikes and not give free passes. Our defense is coming along with us practicing more outside and we had to replace two outfielders and we still have some guys in the mix for the outfield spots."

The Tigers will have their work cut out for them as the TVL is a very competitive league and every game presents a difficult challenge.

"The Tri-Valley League is going to be a very tough league this year," Brubaker said. "A lot of teams have improved, and the teams to watch as usual are Upper Dauphin, Halifax. Newport was real good last year and their program seems to be getting better, Greenwood has some good pitching and a few very good ballplayers coming back, while Millersburg and Line Mountain are there as usual with some of their guys coming back. The plan is the same with every team in the league — if guys are throwing strikes and limiting mis-

takes every team and every game will be competitive."

With the competition around the league as stiff as it is, and hitting possibly dropping off, Brubaker knows that defense and being able to get multiple runners on base is more important than ever, and can be the difference between a win and a loss.

"It's going to be the pitching along with the defense will have to be top notch this year," Brubaker said. "We need our pitchers to not give up walks and the defense making solid plays ... not committing errors and limiting guys on the bases. With the offense down all over the league small ball will be a very important factor this season."