On Campus

Putting the “We” in Sweep

Summer 2014



Kiera Wood / Columbia Spectator

The Lions baseball team won its second straight Ivy League Championship by sweeping Dartmouth in a best-of-three-games title series this spring. The series began and ended with a doubleheader played in front of a packed crowd at Columbia’s Satow Stadium on May 10. In the first game, Lions ace David Speer threw eight innings, striking out seven, and David Vandercook and Robb Paller each homered to give the Light Blue a 6–2 victory. In the second, Lions starter Kevin Roy held the Big Green to just three hits over six innings, and the Lions blasted another pair of homers, this time by Vandercook and Gus Craig, en route to a 4–1 victory.

“A total team effort,” said Lions coach Brett Boretti after the six-hour battle, which gave the Columbia baseball team its third Ancient Eight title since 2008. “Up and down the lineup — it hasn’t been one or two guys.”

Indeed, a key to the Lions’ success in recent years, wrote Tom Pedulla in a *New York Times* feature about Columbia’s baseball program on May 27, is Boretti’s commitment to recruiting ballplayers with a team-first mentality. He and his fellow coaches regularly ask upperclassmen for their impressions of potential recruits’ personalities, and only those deemed humble enough are offered spots on the team. The result, say Lions players, is a remarkably supportive clubhouse environment.

“The type of team we have is ‘we’ centered,” senior catcher Mike Fischer told the *Times*. “If a guy goes 0 for 4 and we win, he’s the happiest guy in the clubhouse. You don’t get that a lot.”

That’s not to say the 2014 Lions (29–20, 15–5 Ivy) lacked stars. David Speer, a lefty who posted seven wins and a 1.86 ERA, was Putting the “we” in sweep NEWS named the Ivy League Pitcher of the Year in May; the next month, he was drafted by the Cleveland Indians. Will Savage, a freshman who batted .320 and stole fourteen bases, was named the Ivy League Rookie of the Year. Other standouts included Kevin Roy and fellow sophomore pitcher George Thanopoulos, a hard-throwing right-hander with a 2.60 ERA, and sophomore outfielder Robb Paller, who led the team with 35 RBI.

But every Lion is expected to exhibit moral character on par with his athleticism.

“We try to go above and beyond to find really good, unselfish people who fit in,” Boretti told the *Times*. “We really feel the type of individual we’re recruiting is the most important thing.”

The Lions’ winning chemistry got them into the NCAA Regional Tournament for the second year in a row this spring. Unfortunately, they were bumped out after two one-run losses: the first to Texas Tech, 3 – 2, and the second to Bethune-Cookman, 6 –5.



Guide to school abbreviations