



DAVIS WINBORNE/ MISSOURIAN
Columbia College's Andrew Warner during a March 3 game. Warner is a key player returning for the Cougars and looks to improve upon his incredible 2017 run.

Cougars have high hopes for season

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A 35-year hiatus for the Columbia College baseball team didn't seem to matter a season ago.

In the Cougars' first season since 1982, they finished second in the American Midwest Conference with a 34-17 record while going an impressive 24-6 against conference foes.

With coach Darren Munns' team projected to finish second in the AMC by the league's preseason coaches' poll, in which the Cougars received one first-place vote, expectations are even higher this year.

"This is kind of a dream come true — to coach where you're from and start a program," Munns said of his experience leading the team thus far. "It's been challenging but it's also been a lot of fun."

The Cougars lost lone senior Zach Maskill, a first team All-AMC pitcher in 2017, to graduation but have added eight newcomers to the roster and return power-hitting first baseman/catcher Andrew Warner.

"He's a great leader and obviously a great talent," Munns said.

Warner, a senior, hit an incredible .478 and 17 home runs in 51 games during the 2017 season, in which he earned first-team All-AMC and first-team NAIA All-American honors. He was named to the 2018 NAIA Pre-season All-America Team by the NAIA Baseball Coaches Association.

During Columbia College's season-opening doubleheader sweep of Bethel University last weekend, Warner had four hits, four runs scored and

two RBI. That performance earned the senior AMC Player of the Week honors.

With seven players competing for spots in the weekend rotation, the Cougars' pitching staff will give them an opportunity to compete with sixth-ranked Missouri Baptist for the top spot in one of the best conferences in the NAIA.

Along with a strong supply of starters, Columbia College is also returning its closer from a year ago, Craig Smith, who posted a 2.63 earned run average and six saves during the 2017 season.

"It's great to be deep," Munns said. "I've never met a coach that has too much pitching."

On Thursday, the Cougars split a doubleheader against Blue Mountain College and Brescia University (KY) in Blue Mountain, Mississippi.

Columbia College lost to Blue Mountain 4-0 and defeated Brescia 4-2. The Cougars (3-1), will play Brescia again at 2:30 p.m. Friday and Blue Mountain at 6:30 p.m. Friday in Mississippi.

Although the start of the season will prove crucial in seeing what the team's newcomers have to offer and what pitchers assert themselves as potential weekend rotation options, Munns said the conference play will be key to earning national recognition with a program that is still trying to gain its footing.

"I feel like we play in one of the best two or three baseball conferences in the country," Munns said. "If you do well in our conference, then the national stuff will take care of itself."

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Cavs send Isaiah Thomas to Lakers

The Associated Press

After a quick stop, Isaiah Thomas is moving again. The point guard's strange stay with the Cavaliers is over.

Thomas, who was never a good fit in Cleveland while recovering from a hip injury, was traded hours before the NBA's deadline to the Los Angeles Lakers, a person with direct knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Thomas was dealt with forward Channing Frye and one of the Cavs' two first-round draft picks to the Lakers for former Missouri point guard Jordan Clarkson and forward Larry Nance Jr., said the person who spoke on condition of anonymity because the teams need NBA approval before the trade can be completed.

Clarkson played only one season for the Tigers after transferring from Tulsa in 2012. Currently in his fourth year in the NBA, the Tampa native scored 17.5 points per game and shot .448 from the field in 35 games, all starts, during his lone Missouri season. The Cavs will keep their other first-round pick from the trade that sent Kyrie Irving to Boston last summer for Thomas, who struggled on the floor in Cleveland and seemed at odds with teammates and coaches.



PHELAN M. EBENHACK/The Associated Press
Former Cleveland Cavaliers guard Isaiah Thomas, left, drives to the basket in front of Orlando Magic guard Elfrid Payton, right, during the first half of Thursday's game in Orlando.

Trail Blazers send Vonleh to Bulls

The Portland Trail Blazers have traded forward Noah Vonleh to the Chicago Bulls in exchange for Milovan Rakovic, said a person with knowledge of the situation. The person spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the move at Thursday deadline had not formally announced.

Vonleh, the No. 9 overall pick by Charlotte in the 2014 NBA draft, averaged 3.6 points and 5.1 rebounds in 33 games this season, including 12 starts. For his career, Vonleh has averaged 3.9 points and 4.5 rebounds.

Pistons acquire Nelson in trade with Chicago

The Detroit Pistons have acquired guard Jameer Nelson from the Chicago Bulls for center Willie Reed. The

teams announced the trade Thursday.

The Bulls also received the right to swap second-round draft picks with Detroit in 2022. Chicago immediately waived Reed.

Nelson, who turns 36 on Friday, averaged 5.1 points a game with New Orleans this season before being traded to Chicago last week. He hasn't played since.

The Pistons acquired Reed last week as well, as part of the trade that sent Blake Griffin to Detroit. Reed was suspended six games Tuesday after the NBA looked into the circumstances surrounding his arrest last August on a domestic violence charge.

Celtics sign Monroe in lone deadline move

The Celtics signed free agent center Greg Monroe in their lone move at the trade deadline on Thursday.

Monroe was waived last week by Phoenix after being traded from Milwaukee in November. He is averaging 10.4 points and 7.4 rebounds this season.

Walker to replace Porzingis in ASG

Charlotte Hornets guard Kemba Walker has been picked to replace the injured Kristaps Porzingis in the NBA All-Star Game.

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver selected Walker on Thursday for the opening on Team LeBron that was created when Porzingis tore his left ACL on Tuesday.

Walker will make his second straight All-Star Game appearance. Porzingis was the fourth player drafted by captain LeBron James who had to be replaced because of injury, joining DeMarcus Cousins, Kevin Love and John Wall.



GERRY BROOME/The Associated Press
North Carolina's Kenny Williams, center, saves the ball from going out of bounds as Duke's Gary Trent Jr., right, looks on during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, on Thursday.

No. 21 Tar Heels upset No. 9 Blue Devils with late rally

Berry scores 21 to push UNC over Duke in close rivalry showdown

The Associated Press

Joel Berry II scored 21 points and No. 21 North Carolina rallied from 12 down in the first half to beat No. 9 Duke 82-78 in Thursday's renewal of the fierce rivalry.

Kenny Williams made six 3-pointers and matched his career high with 20 points for the Tar Heels (18-7, 7-5 Atlantic Coast Conference), who roared out of halftime with a 16-2 run that erased what was left of Duke's early lead.

Cameron Johnson added 18 points and 13 rebounds, helping the Tar Heels overcome the Blue Devils' significant size advantage to own the

glass (28-17) after halftime.

North Carolina led by as many as 10 and saw Duke get to within 74-71 late, but the Tar Heels did just enough to hang on. Theo Pinson punctuated the win with a dunk off the press break with 11.1 seconds left to seal it.

Gary Trent Jr. scored 16 points to lead the Blue Devils (19-5, 7-4), who have lost two straight.

Players' Union to open spring training camp, invites free agents

The Associated Press

The baseball players' union will open its own spring training camp for the first time since the end of the 1994-95 strike, inviting free agents to work out at the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Florida.

Union head Tony Clark said Thursday the camp will open Tuesday and workouts will start the following day under Bo Porter, the Houston Astros' manager in 2013-14. The camp is scheduled to run through March 4, and the union has the option to extend the camp through the end of the month.

More than 100 players who exercised their right to become free agents last November are without final agreements. Teams start spring training workouts next Wednesday.

Agent Scott Boras represents 15 free agents seeking jobs, a group that includes J.D. Martinez, Mike Moustakas, Eric Hosmer and Jake Arrieta. His company has its own training facilities in North Miami, Florida, and Newport Beach, California, and he is not sure whether his clients will work out at his facilities or IMG.

"They certainly will have the option to use either," he said.

The union sent an email



MORRY GASH/The Associated Press
Tony Clark, executive director of the Major League Players Association, answers questions Feb. 19, 2017, at a news conference in Phoenix.

to agents announcing the decision. The camp will be open to the players who became free agents under Article XXB of the sport's collective bargaining agreement, the most prominent group on the market.

"The location is a dedicated, major league-caliber site, with multiple full/half fields, a private locker room, dedicated training staff and an advanced workout facility with a trainer and strength and conditioning coordinator," the union said.

Personal trainers will not be allowed inside the facility. Players will be provided workout gear, and the union is arranging liability insurance, travel and housing. Players will be given per diems. They are to bring

their own bats and shoes.

The players' association paid \$60,000 in 1995 to rent a training site for three weeks in Homestead, Florida. Twenty-nine players were there when it opened, including Dave Stewart, Todd Stottlemyre, Chris Sabo, Howard Johnson and Mickey Tettleton.

They wore green, blue, black and red jerseys, along with matching caps.

"We're calling ourselves the Homestead Hobos. We're all misfits," utilityman Randy Velarde said.

Larry Walker, Orel Hersher, John Kruk and Kevin Brown were among the top stars who did not attend the camp because they thought they were close to reaching deals.