

## JC Baseball Preview: El Camino and Harbor programs plan returns to prominence in 2012

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The El Camino and Harbor College baseball programs are coming off seasons in which the breaks often didn't go their way and playoff bids remained out of reach.

Both coaches believe they had a super recruiting class and boast a quality bounce-back player or two, and both teams appear they can pitch and score, which wasn't always the case last season.

The big question may be: Can either team play defense?

For El Camino, pitching has been a priority ever since Nate Fernley took over as head coach.

Fernley, heading into his sixth season as El Camino's skipper, was an All-American hurler at BYU and the pitching coach at Long Beach City College for two years. He had the LBCC staff ranked first in the South Coast Conference both years and helped the Vikings win the state title in 2006 before coming to El Camino, where he is 137-75 in five years.

El Camino, which was 16-19 last year, won conference titles in 2007 and 2010 under Fernley and looks primed for an improved season.

Fernley has a deep group of quality pitchers to work with, including returning All-South Coast Conference selection Alex Mistuloff (Redondo High), who went 5-1 with a 1.82 ERA last season.

Mistuloff began the season as a closer and finished as a starter.

"He'll be our Opening Day starter," Fernley said. "He closed for us until about two weeks into conference, then we moved him to starter and he got us deep into games."

El Camino won nine

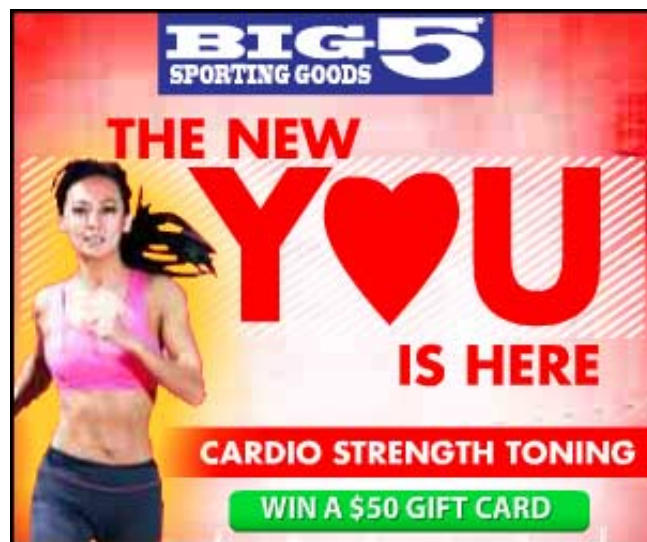
of its last 12 games after making the move.

"When he made the transition, it gave us a big boost," Fernley said. "We had a tough time getting him in situations to close games last year."

Joining Mistuloff in the starting rotation figures to be sophomore Drew Freeman (Palos Verdes) and freshman Ralph Ramirez (Torrance).

Freeman looks ready for a breakout season. After graduating from Palos Verdes High in 2008, Freeman didn't play for two years. He enrolled at El Camino last year, made the team and saw limited action.

"He felt his way through last year, now he has his legs back and looks great," Fernley said. "He throws 91 mph at times; he could be a big surprise. No one has worked harder."



Ramirez leads what could be a stellar group of freshman pitchers that also includes Daniel Timmerman (West Torrance), Sean Isaac (Mira Costa) and Grant Wessel (Redondo).

"The Bay League guys will make up the bulk of the innings as newcomers," Fernley said.

Other pitchers who could make an impact include Cole Trezek, Jeff Brach, Michael Heredia and Jess Simpson.

"It's a luxury this year to have a lot of guys who can throw strikes and change speeds," Fernley said. "They all have pitched well. It's a question of how I can divide up innings that they've earned."

El Camino's infield is led by sophomore second baseman Brice Savage and sophomore shortstop Peter Ives, with sophomore Cole Trezek at third and Justin McCullough (El Segundo), Austin Watters (West Torrance) and Sean Isaacs (Mira Costa) among the possibilities at first base.

The wild card is Grant Palmer (El Segundo), who could add a stellar defensive option at shortstop if he recovers fully from labrum surgery. Fernley said Palmer is not yet fully recovered but could be at some point in the season.

Sophomore Marvin Flores (Torrance) and McCullough likely will handle the catching duties.

El Camino's outfield received a boost with the addition of New Mexico bounceback Ron Galosic (San Pedro), a center fielder who can run and has some power.

All-conference returner Luke Klocek (West), who batted .371 with 13 RBIs last year, is slated to play right field and DH. Freshmen Johnny Palmer (West) and Ramirez (when he's not pitching) could share time in left field.

Fernley said if he has one concern it's his

defense on the left side of the infield. Ives (.349-2-26) brings a lot of offense as a shortstop and is looking to make strides defensively. Rex Calkins (South Torrance) is El Camino's best defensive third baseman but may be lost for the year with a torn meniscus.

"Left-side infield defense is not something you want to have as a question mark," Fernley said. "But Ives is great offensively, and if he can make all the routine plays we'll be great."

The Warriors have lofty goals every year and this season is no different.

"Every year about 20 teams start out having a shot talent-wise, and we have that ability," Fernley said. "But can you come together and do it?"

The same question goes for Harbor under second-year coach Derek Nicholson. The Seahawks were 15-21 last year in Nicholson's first season, not having enough pitching to be a playoff team.

Harbor had a team ERA of 4.79 last season.

Harbor set out to change that and has compiled an impressive group of pitchers to remedy the situation.



Harbor pitching coach Keith Ramsey said he has five pitchers vying for three starting spots, including returning starter Brent Weber (Mira Costa), Hawaii bounce-back Robert Parucha (Mira Costa), New Mexico bounce-back Johnathan Mata, freshman Jonathan Hernandez (Banning) and freshman James Glawe (Mira Costa).

Mata brings the kind of competitiveness and leadership Harbor loves. Weber is a seasoned hurler now after struggling early last year before finding success in time for conference play.

Ramsey said all five pitchers are capable of having big years.

Jamaal Moore (Westchester), Chad Kim (Rolling Hills Prep), Matt Zuvich (San Pedro) and Anthony Konders (Torrance) are among the other pitchers who could make an impact.

Both Hernandez and Moore are tall left-handed pitchers who can reach 90 mph.

"Pitching is something we set out to fix and I think we did that," Nicholson said.

Harbor lost stellar defensive players in shortstop Carlos Avila and third baseman Marc Venning but looks strong in the infield with all-conference player Kyle Demarco (Mira Costa) back at second base and freshman Anthony Canjura (San Pedro) stepping in at shortstop.

"Demarco is a hard-nosed spark plug at the top of our lineup, and Canjura is lights out," Nicholson said. "He's a special player with ability and makeup off the charts."

Michael Encinas (Torrance), Anthony Villela (Torrance) and Jack Deangelis (Los Alamitos) are battling for playing time at third base and sophomore Martin Lemus (Lawndale) gives Harbor a power threat at first.

"The defense of Avila and Venning is hard to

replace," Nicholson said. "They helped us have a great defense. But Canjura showed up with the tools and Demarco has turned into the player we thought he'd be."

Harbor's outfield will feature Austin Chavira (Mira Costa) in center, Kris Cayton (Mira Costa) in right and Andrew Carbajal (Mary Star) in left. Cayton and Carbajal each hit over .300 last season as freshmen.

Nicholson said the heart of the team is sophomore catcher Jackson Morrow (Mira Costa), who battled injuries and struggled at the plate last year but played through it. He's healthy again and looks set for a big season.

Nicholson is excited about the makeup of the club and is thinking big.

"Our goal is the state championship," Nicholson said. "You always have to think big. That's why we play."

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