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## Taking the Express route

Rockville looking to create quick chemistry

Wednesday, June 7, 2006

by John Y. Wehmueller  
 Staff Writer

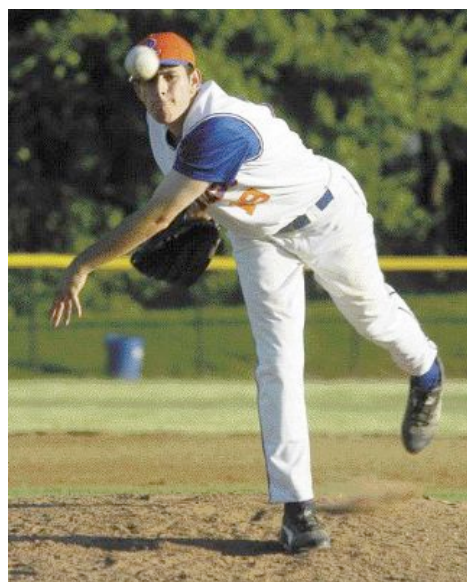
Over the last two-thirds of the 2005 Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate Baseball League season, the Rockville Express were as good as anyone. The first-year franchise won 15 of its final 25 games, good for third place in the regular-season standings.

The bad news was the start — the Express lost 10 of its first 14 games. With a heavy contingent of players from California trying to get used to life in the mid-Atlantic, the team's early-season chemistry is a concern; one manager Tom Shaffer hopes he's solved.

"We have a lot of guys from California who have played together and are already close," Shaffer said. "Chemistry's not going to be a problem for us. ... It's not going to take too long to adapt to what we're trying to do."

With the help of West Coast-based pitching coach Tom Sizemore, Shaffer and the Express have again assembled a talented group of Californians. At the core of the group are four infielders who grew up playing baseball together, and now all play in the University of California system — Michael Gilmartin and Ben Orloff of UC-Irvine, Phil Boscarino of UC-Riverside and catcher Cody Dee of UC-Santa Barbara.

Two more infielders, second baseman Matt Eiden (Mount St. Mary's) and corner infielder Mike Murphy (Maryland) return from last year's team, and should have little trouble settling in. Murphy hit .282 and slugged .346 in 21 games for the Express last summer. But the biggest find might be 6-foot-3, lefty-swinging Mike Notaro (Fresno State), whom Shaffer



Click [here](#) to enlarge this photo  
 Chris Rossi/The Gazette  
 Matt Swissman (St. Mary's), a Rockville native, is back this year for the Express after making six appearances for the team last summer.

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compares to R.J. Brown, the team's all-star first baseman/designated hitter last summer.

The outfield features three more Californians — Steve Schneider (Orange Coast College), Jordan Ott (Pierce J.C.) and Dylan Gaughen (UNLV), plus Silver Spring native Ivor Hodgson (Mount St. Mary's). But the key, as always, will be the mound.

“I would say pitching is going to carry us,” Shaffer said. “Of course, in a wood bat league, pitching dominates the first two or three weeks anyway. We've got a lot of redshirts trying to get their feet wet, but they play at some decent schools.”

The team as a whole is young, with 15 sophomores and a freshman on the 31-man roster. The pitching staff is a microcosm, with seven of the 15 hurlers underclassmen.

Four are returnees, led by Chase Kornemann (Delaware State), who went 3-3 with a 2.30 ERA last season. Billy Butler (Pepperdine) and Kyle Brown (UC-Santa Barbara) were spot starters a year ago and will slot in somewhere. Rockville native Matt Swissman (St. Mary's) made six appearances last summer. The newcomers include eight West Coast hurlers and Quince Orchard graduate Chris Maloney (Embry Riddle), who Shaffer said will likely work out of the bullpen.

If this year's team can avoid the slow start of last year's, the Express could be in for big things. Parity appears to be the order of the day in the Cal Sr. League. After four of the six teams finished within 5 1/2 games a year ago, league managers agree things could tighten up even more in 2006.

And, the Express organization as a whole looks to be hitting its stride in season two. The long-awaited press box at Montgomery College-Rockville is due for completion this week, and the dugouts will have concrete floors this season, as opposed to dirt. The county has also approved lights to be installed next summer, so the team will be able to host night games, and a new outfield fence and batting cages are also in the works.

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#### **the fast lane**

**Manager: Tom Shaffer,**  
**2nd year Last year's**  
**record: 19-20, 3rd place**

**Key returnees: 1B/3B**  
**Mike Murphy, 2B Matt**  
**Eiden, SP Chase**

**Kornemann, RP Kyle**  
**Brown, RP Billy Butler**

**Key newcomers: P**  
**Chris Maloney, 1B Mike**  
**Notaro**

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