



# MENDOCINO-LAKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 26, 2017

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## **FORMER WILDCATS BALLPLAYERS AND COACH JOIN THE EAGLES**

**Written by: Joe Langstaff**

Eagles head baseball coach Conor Bird said that recruiting local student-athletes has been a priority of the Mendocino College Eagles baseball program, especially the graduating seniors who were members of the highly successful Ukiah High Wildcats varsity baseball program the past three seasons.

The Wildcats, led by head coach Steve Summers who took over the reins of the program in 2015, have experienced the program's best three-year stretch in the last decade of play. Three seasons in a row, the program has had winning overall records, winning records in North Bay League play and three times participated in the North Coast Section, Division 2 playoffs.

The 2017 team finished 6<sup>th</sup> in the North Coast Section Division II baseball standings and made it to the semi-finals of the NCS D-2 playoffs.

A sizable portion of the credit for that success is due to a core group of players who played for the Wildcats each of those three years as sophomores, juniors and then seniors this past season.

That group included Joe Brazil, Keegan Beebe, Karter Koch, Morgan Edwards and Devin Kirby. They played for the Wildcats JV team in 2014 as freshmen and then for the varsity in 2015, 2016 and 2017. Each finished their high school ball playing careers in fine fashion during the 2017 season.

Brazil, started at third base for the Wildcats and played in 25 of the team's 27 games. He finished third in the NBL in batting average with a lofty .429 average. He was fifth in the league in slugging percentage at .588. He was second on the Wildcats in RBIs with 13 and runs scored with 15. He had an excellent 1.034 OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging percentage)

Koch alternated between being a starting pitcher and a starting shortstop for the Wildcats. He played in all 27 games. He made 12 appearances on the mound for the Wildcats, compiling a 4-2 record.

He was second in the league in earned run average with a miniscule 1.19 ERA. He was fifth in the league with 8 stolen bases and strikeouts with 45. He batted .348 and led the team with 8 doubles and 19 runs scored and had an OPS of .892.

Edwards was the team's starting catcher and played in 26 games. He led the team with 16 RBIs and was third in runs scored with 12. He was No. 1 in the league with a defensive average of .994, making just one error the entire



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season.

Besides playing baseball for Ukiah High, Edwards also played football and basketball. In his senior year, he was named Ukiah High Male Student-Athlete of the Year.

Beebe played in all 27 games for the Wildcats in 2017. He pitched and played in the outfield. He made 10 appearances on the mound and compiled a 2.66 ERA. Among starters he was second on the team in fielding percentage at .961.

Kirby was the league leader in wins with 7, strikeouts with 68 and ERA at 0.75. He was tied for third on the team with runs scored with 11.

Brazil, Koch and Kirby were named to the 2017 NBL Baseball All-League First Team. Edwards was named to the All-NBL Second Team.

It would have been a clean sweep if all five of these Wildcats seniors had decided to continue their education and baseball careers at the college level at Mendocino College. That didn't quite happen.

Kirby elected to enroll at a community college in the South Bay. But the other four Wildcats did decide to stay local and enroll at Mendocino College to begin their college education and play for the Eagles' baseball program.

Beebe had decided in the spring that he would enroll at Mendocino College and play for the Eagles. But the other three players took longer to make their final decisions. They each initially had selected other colleges.

Edwards explained, "I was going to go Fresno State. Then I changed my mind and decided to go to Ohlone College in May." Brazil: "I was going to go to Santa Rosa JC." Koch: "I was going to go to Butte (Community College in Oroville). Then we realized we were all good and we should stick together. So that's what we did (enrolled at Mendocino College)."

The players were also impressed by the new Mendocino baseball coaching staff and the progress the program made this past season. The Eagles at midseason were ranked in the top 20 in Northern California Community College Poll and were in contention for a postseason playoff.

Another plus for choosing Mendocino was the coaching staff's efforts in helping six of the eight sophomores on the 2017 team sign with four-year colleges, receiving scholarships and/or financial assistance from those schools.

Koch took notice of the Eagles' staff. "We knew Bird was a good coach. He kind of turned the program around. Micky was coming here to be the pitching coach. We heard that Jeff (Piver, a former Wildcat) and David (Mansell) signed with San Francisco State. Once I knew Micky was coming here it was kind of a done deal for me. It was the best place for me."

Edwards noted the program's turnaround last season. "They (Mendocino baseball) went from being a 7-win team the year before to being an 18-win team last year and being in contention for playoffs. With this year's group,



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everybody is showing and up and putting in the work.”

All four players concurred that staying home and playing at Mendocino College was a much better deal financially than having to pay for housing or commute long distances to other community colleges or pay for housing and much higher tuition costs at a four-year school.

The “Micky” referred to by Koch is Micky Coughlin, who was the Wildcats’ pitching coach the last three seasons. He will assume those same duties with Eagles this year, joining the Mendocino coaching staff.

Coughlin is no newcomer to the area. He was a student-athlete at Mendocino College and was a teammate with then Eagles pitcher Conor Bird on the 2001 Eagles baseball team.

Before his stint as a coach with the Wildcats, Coughlin was a volunteer assistant with the Eagles’ baseball team for a couple years in the mid 2000’s and then paid assistant pitching coach for the Eagles softball team in the 2009 and 2010 seasons. In recent years he’s run a pitching program for local athletes and a weighted ball program this past summer. For the last three seasons he was the pitching coach for Ukiah High varsity baseball team.

Coughlin says he’s “really happy to be here. It’s nice to be back at Mendocino.”

Given his familiarity with the incoming Wildcats players, Coughlin’s knowledge of those players should be an added benefit for the Eagles’ staff. He offered his observations and comments on each of Wildcats players joining the Eagles’ team.

“Keegan is real personable. He has a good attitude. He listens and applies. He projects really high. Coach Bird really likes him. I really like him. His fastball is up to 86-88 miles per hour. He’s got a very good changeup.

“Joe is a player you don’t have to worry about. He’s always going to get his work in. He has a huge passion for the game. He does everything with full intent. It doesn’t matter what the drill is, He’s going to do it 100 percent. He’s an intelligent person, a quality person; someone I love to have on my team. With his work ethic, he could be even better in college than he was in high school.

“Karter has grown immensely, especially the last year or so in his work ethic and passion for the game. He’s talented enough to be a two-way player; a successful pitcher in college and a successfully position player. He brings a lot of fire and passion for the game. He’s a great athlete and a hard core competitor.

“Morgan is really intelligent. He’s really thoughtful and a very good listener. He asks some of the best questions. He has a lot of gifts and tools when it comes to his size. He’s a three-sport athlete. He’s very athletic; very gifted. He has a very strong arm as a catcher and blocking has improved this past month.

The non-traditional season for community college baseball began September 5 and ends November 18. During that period community college baseball teams work on skills, drills and conditioning and may schedule up to 10 scrimmages with other community college teams. The Eagles have two scheduled at home this week: Friday (11 a.m.) and Saturday (noon) with Shasta College.