

## Relaxed Environment Key To Success

By: Brandon Januska



Hammond, Ind. – May 25, 2023 – Northern League Baseball returns tonight with a rematch of last year's finals between the Northwest Indiana Oilmen and the reigning champion Lake County Corn Dogs. Meanwhile, the Southland Vikings continue the countdown to their season opener, which takes place in just five days on May 30.

The Vikings enter the 2023 season with a good mix of new players and Northern League veterans. It will be up to first year manager Sullivan Stickann to determine how to best utilize all of the talent on his roster.

Stickann has coaching experience serving as the pitching coach at Olive Harvey College. He also previously served as head coach of the freshman baseball team at Munster High School. This summer will be his first time leading a collegiate level squad and he says that he is "excited for the opportunity."

On the mound, one of the players that Stickann can turn to is two-time Northern League All-Star Nolan Vlcek, who is back for his third season with the Vikings. When asked what brings him back to the Northern League each summer, the word "relaxed" often came up.

"It's just relaxed. It's how all baseball should be in my opinion, just all relaxed. Everything should be relaxed," Vlcek said. "Even in pro ball. I have a bunch of buddies in pro ball right now and they say yeah, there's pressure, but it's super relaxed. That's how I wish every team was."

A relaxed environment can especially be beneficial in helping young players with their transition from hitting high school pitching to college pitching. That is the transition Class of 2023 graduates will face, including outfielder Freddie Ragsdale III.

Ragsdale, who is committed to Kent State, said that he chose the Northern League this summer over a league closer to his home because he believes that the level of competition will better prepare him for college, and he is ready to work hard to improve and succeed.

"[Kent State] said that I should get plenty of playing time if I put in the work, and now I'm going to put in the work," he said.

That's the kind of mindset that can help a Vikings team hoping to extend a streak of six straight seasons making the playoffs as they look to win their first league title since 2017.

Vlcek added, "When the Vikings are on your schedule, just watch out because we're going for it all this year."

You can check out the 2023 Vikings schedule by [Clicking Here](#).