

LOCAL SPORTS

McFarland sign with UIS

Print Page

EHS senior will continue baseball career

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Bill McFarland can now place all his concentration on his last season as an Edwardsville Tiger after signing a letter of intent to continue his college baseball career at the University of Illinois-Springfield.

The towering 6-foot-3, 237 pound righthanded pitcher will be inheriting the moniker of staff ace for EHS as a senior and clearing his mind of a major decision like finding a college was the first step in the right direction of a successful final prep season.

"It's like getting the monkey off my back," said McFarland. "It's an awesome feeling just to worry about your last year of high school and play your final year of baseball for the Tigers. You don't have to worry about the next level, you can just keep focusing on what you need to do here. I'm very excited. I love the sport and it's a blessing to get to play after high school."

His junior season produced success, going 5-0 on the mound in 15 games, including seven starts, and racking up a respectable 1.96 ERA.

Some of his starts came against talented competitors such as Vianney, Trenton Wesclin and Belleville Althoff. But Tiger skipper Tim Funkhouser said this season McFarland will see the slate of Southwestern Conference foes.

"He got a lot of quality innings last year and was 5-0 with a good ERA and he'll be one of our conference guys this year and he'll log a lot of innings there and we'll be counting on him," Funkhouser said. "I think as you bump up the ladder you're facing all the better competition on a more consistent basis. I think he's going to go out and compete and throw well for us."

As for picking UIS, a program in its infancy, it was something intriguing to McFarland. The Prairie Stars will jump start their baseball program in the Spring of 2011 as a member of the Great Lakes Valley Conference, taking SIUE's slot after its move to Division I.

"What attracted me was obviously the coach and obviously the education," McFarland said. "To get a degree from the University of Illinois is a heavy thing you can carry deep into your career and to get a chance to start traditions at a new school with everything new, it's a good feeling."

UIS head coach Brian Grunzke has a creditable resume, spending the 2009 season as the assistant coach at Northern Iowa, following two years as an assistant at Arkansas-Little Rock.

Prior to that he was the head coach at Waldorf College in Iowa for 16 years, where he helped transform the program from junior college status into a four-year institution.



Edwardsville High senior Bill McFarland, seated center, signed recently to continue his baseball career at the University of Illinois-Springfield. With McFarland, also seated, are parents Brian and Maria McFarland. In back is EHS baseball coach Tim Funkhouser. Photo by Bill Roseberry.

Funkhouser feels with Grunzke's experience, coupled with the opportunity for playing time, the Prairie Stars should be a good fit for McFarland.

"They're looking for guys that can go in there and compete at that level and I think he's going to do a good job of that," said Funkhouser. "I've heard some excellent things about their coach, too. It's an uphill battle starting a program, but I think it will be a nice experience, too. I think a program like that you have a great opportunity — there's no returning guys, there may be some guys transferring in or guys that are coming from other high schools — but I think it gives you a fresh start and a chance to go in there and start competing for positions right off the bat and maybe even have a greater role than you would have at an established place."

McFarland won't quickly forget his days donning the orange and black and with one more season beginning at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday in Greenville, he's prepared to be a big part of that Edwardsville tradition.

"My personal goal is to fill the role coach Funkhouser and coach (Mike) Waldo have given me and help lead our team to the deepest depths of the playoffs this year," said McFarland. "Hopefully we can get another chance at O'Fallon, among other teams and get another shot at a state title.

"Obviously, we have a great tradition here for Tiger baseball and athletics. The coaches are awesome here and most of all I'll miss being with all my teammates. There's no better experience than hanging out with your teammates after a game or playing hard on the field. I love it."

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