



Opening Day: May 24, 2019, Fremont Moo at Hastings Sodbusters

Four Hastings natives featured on 2019 roster

NICK BLASNITZ

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In the Sodbusters' inaugural season last year, the home crowd got a kick out of getting to watch Hastings natives Brooks Asher and Vinny Schmidt play on the same field they competed on throughout high school.

This season, four Hastings natives will don the green and gold for the Sodbusters.

Joining Brooks will be his brother, Trey, as well as Connor Laux and Grant Schmidt.

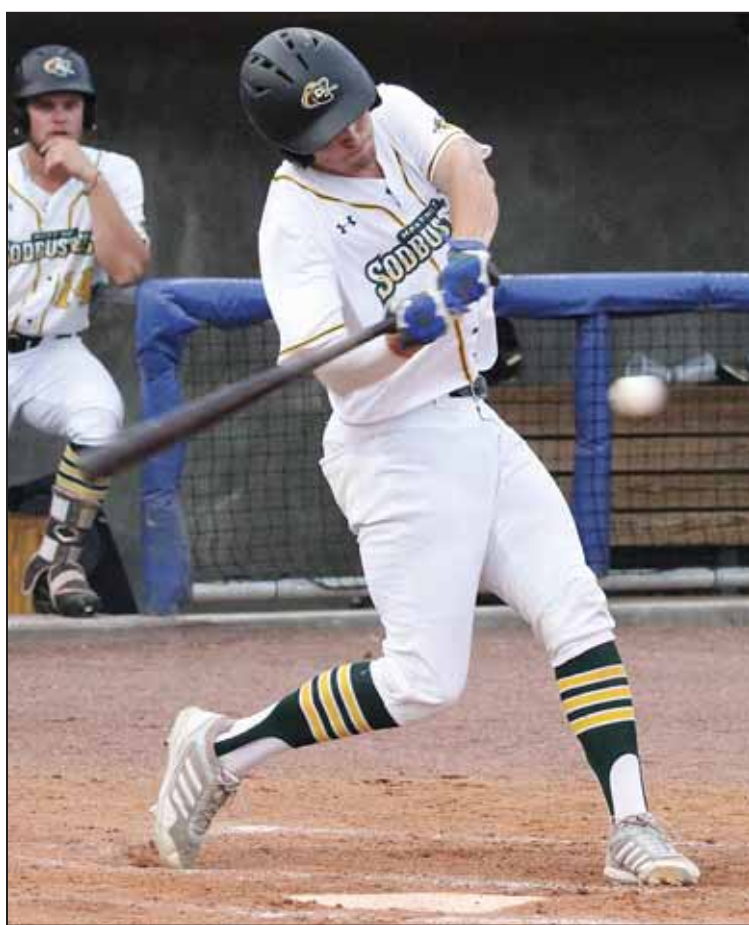
"After last year's (Sodbusters) team, when they made the Sodbusters and everything, it was something I wanted to do my freshman summer. I just wanted to be able to come back home and play in front of the Hastings crowd, because it's such a good crowd and I've played in front of it my entire life," Laux said. "(I wanted to be) able to play in front of family and friends, as well as playing at Duncan on that new turf."

Laux, Trey and Schmidt all play for Cloud County Community College, with Trey and Laux both wrapping up their freshman campaigns, while Schmidt is a sophomore. Schmidt was excited when he heard his former American Legion teammates would be joining him at Cloud County.

"Before the season even started, with Trey and Connor coming in, I knew they were going to love it here and that it would be fun to play with them again since we had so much fun with legion ball," Schmidt said. "It's been good for all of us. We've all done well."

Schmidt improved from his freshman season, belting 13 home runs and driving in 48 runs, but he said he went through plenty of struggles as a freshman.

"Last year wasn't the year I was hoping for. What I think I



AMY ROH/Tribune

Hastings Sodbusters Brooks Asher hits during a game against the Casper Horseheads on Aug. 3, 2018, at Duncan Field.

struggled most with last year was that I've never really struggled before, in my entire life in any other sport. Nothing like I experienced it last year. Last year was rough. I didn't know how to handle it mentally because I've never experience it before," he said. "I kind of took last year and put it in the past, but I've also used it as motivation to want to do better for this season. It's helped a lot. There have been ups and downs, but what I went through last year has definitely made me stronger mentally and physically. I'm thankful for last season."

After the season, Schmidt went

to play summer ball for a league in Canada. As they played the Canadian national anthem before every game, Schmidt thought to himself just how lucky he is to have the opportunity to play baseball in another country.

"Being up there, traveling — they have some awesome, awesome stadiums up there, so that was really cool to experience that and just meet new guys. The fans treated us like we were professionals," Schmidt said. "It's something I'll never forget. I'm glad I did it."

But after being in another country for all of last summer,

Schmidt decided to remain closer to home. When opportunity to play for the Sodbusters came up, he quickly took it.

"After last summer, being in a whole different country, I figured this summer I can still play ball but be closer to home or just come home in general," Schmidt said. "I just figured I'd come to Hastings, be home for a summer and just play ball. There's nothing like Duncan Field, everyone knows that. Just come back home, play ball, meet new friends, being with friends and family, that's what it's all about. That's the main reason I'm coming back home, so friends and family can watch me."

Laux has experience plenty of adversity in his baseball journey. After committing to play for the University of Nebraska-Kearney, the Lopers decided to cut program. Laux didn't know if he'd set foot on a field again after that.

"After UNK dropped their program. I really, truly didn't know if I wanted to play college baseball anymore," he said. "Just knowing that Grant and Trey were going to be there and they were great friends and teammates I've played with my entire life, it made choosing Cloud easier, knowing I'd be around them every single day."

Laux has played in 50 games this season for the Thunderbirds, hitting .310 and recording 34 RBIs. He said at the collegiate level, the game is faster and the players are quicker, but he's adjusted well.

A former Hastings Tiger, Laux said he's excited to play on the new turf at Duncan. Cloud County played one game at Duncan this season when it took on the Hastings College junior varsity squad. Laux feels like the turf gives Duncan a younger feel and more life. Playing on Duncan as a Thunderbird brought back a

lot of memories for Laux, and now he'll be able to make some more as a Sodbuster, playing on his home field at a highly-competitive level.

"I went on (the Sodbusters) opening night, and it was just packed. I've never seen Duncan packed that full, besides the first round of the state tournament my sophomore year. I've never seen it that full and it was just a different atmosphere," Laux said. "Being able to play college baseball this year and knowing that will be similar talent that we'll be playing with the Sodbusters is exciting."

Trey said he got "roughed up" in his first outing at Cloud, but he settled in and finished the year 4-2 with an ERA of 2.53. When deciding where he wanted to play this summer, Trey turned to Brooks, who had already spent a season with the Sodbusters.

"I just told him that he'd love to come back," Brooks said. "First off, getting to live at home, that was one of the big things. And then the level of baseball, I didn't really know what to expect, but it was a high level of baseball. A lot of good Division II and a lot of teams have good Division I players, as well. I think the level of baseball is high."

Trey had gone to Sodbuster games last season to watch Brooks play. One of the big draws for him was the atmosphere he experienced.

"I was really open to it because I had been to a couple games last year, with Brooks playing on the team, and I really just enjoyed the atmosphere," he said. "Being home for the summer and being with a bunch of friends I played with throughout high school really intrigued me."

Brooks is a catcher for the University of Kansas and has appeared in 19 games this season.

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New coaches hoping for similar success in new season

WILL REYNOLDS

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Last year was a roller coaster for the Sodbusters. Owner and General Manager Bryan Frew will tell you that, too.

So far, Frew has invested a lot into the franchise, but nothing more so than his time.

In the team's inaugural season, Frew hired the team's first head coach, Scott Stover, just two weeks before the first game. After Frew realized the stresses of doing what he thought he could — running the front office and daily game logistics as GM, as well as coaching and managing the team on the field — he decided it best to make a last-minute hire and take the weight off of his shoulders.

That lasted about half of the season.

"(Doing both jobs) was what I originally had planned to do so it wasn't too big of an issue. We were incredibly fortunate that Stover was available when he was," Frew said. "We got stuck with some unfortunate things

that happened, but we stayed flexible and I felt right in and night out we put a very quality baseball team on the field."

Shortly after the all-star break, which was hosted by the city of Hastings at Duncan Field, Frew was required to step in and coach after Stover announced he needed to return home in California to attend to some personal matters before the fall semester began at Solano Community College — where he teaches and coaches. Hitting coach Jason Stein had to go start a new job in Texas, so he was absent the entire second half of the season as well.

Stover handed the team over to Frew in the midst of a race for a wildcard spot in the Clark Division, which the Sodbusters eventually earned before losing to the eventual champion Western Nebraska (Gering/Scottsbluff) Pioneers in the divisional playoff, winner-take-all game.

Frew hopes he won't have to deal with the same situation

next week when the Expedition League's second season begins. He's hired two coaches from Murray State College in Tishomingo, Oklahoma.

Ryan McClaran and Travis Spinney will run the show with a little help from Frew, who plans on watching from the press box as he does public address duties.

"I have had several conversations with both of them. McClaran is an up-and-comer, a big baseball guy. He played a long time and is looking to move up the coaching ranks a little bit and sees us as an opportunity to get some experience with a head coaching gig, which is awesome. That's what summer ball is all about. We're very glad to have him running the team on the field," Frew said.

"Travis had a great playing career and plays the game the way I like it to be played. He is a baserunning coach now and I think we have a good mix of coaches in different aspects on what we are trying to accom-

plish. The fact that they coach together at Murray State is a huge plus."

Frew still plans on having some say in the construction of the daily lineup — at least early on — as he built the roster, which features a handful of returners from the 2018 squad.

"I expect to be very involved in all of the conversations. I plan to sit down with Ryan and Travis at the end of the game and touch base on where we're at and how guys feel," Frew said. "They can get my take on what the top-side view of it looks like from the press box. So I think those things will give our team the best chance to win. At the end of the day, it's baseball and what happens between the lines really has nothing to do with who is giving the signs at third base."

McClaran, 27, will be the head coach, with his focus and background on pitching. Spinney, 23, will be assisting with hitting and fielding.

"He's my right hand man,"

McClaran said of Spinney. "If I ever get a head coaching job, he is going to be my first call. He is young and hungry, and wants to get better so I'm all about that."

Neither coach is too familiar with the Midwest, although McClaran did play for a team in Laramie, Wyo., years ago that had an opponent in Casper, where the Horseheads of the Expedition League compete.

"Casper is one of the favorite places I have ever been," McClaran said. "I'm really close with my former host family in Laramie so I hope I get to run into them. My host dad is from Nebraska, so I hope they can make it out. I can't wait to get to that part of the country. It's absolutely beautiful."

For Spinney, it's an entirely new region of the United States.

"I haven't been north of Kansas, so I'm looking forward to it," he said. "Honestly I'm excited to be in Nebraska and just to be traveling up there, and seeing baseball played up there."

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2019 HASTINGS SODBUSTERS



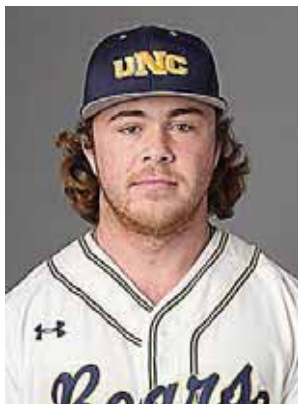
DONAVON MURRAY

Position: OF
Bats/Throws: L/L
Year: Sophomore
College: Baton Rouge Community College
Hometown: Lake Charles, La.
Twitter handle: @D_jMurray
Nickname: DJ
Walk-up song: Can't Tell Me Nothin' — Kanye West
Favorite baseball memory: A 15-pitch at bat walk-off grand slam
Favorite flavor of sunflower seeds: Hot n Spicy



AUSTIN OBLAS

Position: RHP
Bats/Throws: R/R
Year: Freshman
College: Arkansas Tech
Hometown: Gunter, Tex.
Twitter handle: @AOblas
Superstition: Sour Patch Kids
Walk-up song: PIMP — 50 Cent
Sandlot character most associated with: Squints
Favorite baseball move: Moneyball
Favorite MLB player: Chris Sale



JAKE OBLAS

Position: 1B
Bats/Throws: R/R
Year: Sophomore
College: Cisco College
Hometown: Gunter, Tex.
Nickname: Obie
Walk-up song: Penthouse — Wiz Kahlifa
Is a hot dog a sandwich: No
Favorite pro team: New York Yankees
Favorite MLB player: Josh Donaldson
Favorite baseball memory: Walking off opening night for the 2018 Sodbusters



AUSTIN QUICK

Position: RHP
Bats/Throws: R/R
Year: Freshman
College: University of Kansas
Hometown: Lawrence, Kan.
Nickname: Quick
Walk-up song: Old Thing Back — Notorious BIG
Superstition: Music
Favorite baseball movie: Bad News Bears
Is a hot dog a sandwich: No
Sandlot character you most associate with: Squints



CARTER SAKAMOTO

Position: C
Bats/Throws: R/R
Year: Freshman
College: Northern Colorado
Hometown: Bearverton, Ore.
Twitter handle: @carter_sak
Walk-up song: March Madness — Future
Sandlot character most associated with: Smalls
Is a hot dog a sandwich: No
Favorite baseball team: Seattle Mariners



GRANT SCHMIDT

Position: OF
Bats/Throws: R/R
Year: Sophomore
College: Cloud County Community College
Hometown: Hastings
Walk-up song: 2 Step (remix) — E-40, Jim Jones
Is a hot dog a sandwich: No
Favorite pro team: New York Yankees
Favorite MLB player: Christian Yelich
Favorite baseball memory: Hitting 3 home runs in one day



MAX SCHREIBER

Position: RHP
Bats/Throws: R/R
Year: Sophomore
College: University of Nebraska
Hometown: Cardington, Ohio
Twitter handle: @MaxSchreiber22
Nickname: Schreiberz
Walk-up: Man of the year — Schoolboy Q
Is a hot dog a sandwich: No
Favorite baseball movie: Major League
Favorite MLB player: Corey Kluber



ANDREW SHAW

Position: LHP
Bats/Throws: R/L
Year: Sophomore
College: Northeast Community College
Hometown: Dillon, Colo.
Nickname: Shaw
Walk-up song: Tic Toc — 6ix9ine
Sandlot character most associated with: Squints
Is a hot dog a sandwich: No
Favorite baseball move: Bull Durham



IVAN VARELA

Position: RHP
Bats/Throws: R/R
Year: Junior
College: Cabrini University
Hometown: Tuscon, Ariz.
Twitter handle: @IvanVarela47
Nickname: IV
Walk-up: Sleep with the Lights On — Wanton Bishops
Is a hot dog a sandwich: No
Favorite baseball movie: Major League
Favorite MLB player: Mariano Rivera



RYAN MCCLARAN

Head Coach
College: Murray State
Hometown: Whitney, Tex.
Walk-up song: Snake Farm — Ray Wylie Hubbard
Superstition: Prayer
Favorite baseball movie: Moneyball
Nickname: Mack
Is a hot dog a sandwich: No
Favorite MLB player: John Rocker
Favorite pro team: Texas Rangers
Favorite flavor of sunflower seeds: Pickle



TRAVIS SPINNEY

Assistant Coach
College: Murray State
Hometown: Lewisville, Tex.
Superstition: Prayer
Favorite baseball movie: The Rookie
Is a hot dog a sandwich: No
Sandlot character you most associate with: Benny "The Jet"
Favorite pro team: Boston Red Sox
Favorite flavor of sunflower seeds: Pickle

SODBUSTERS STAFF

Owner/GM: Bryan Frew
Assistant GM: Murphy Glen
Stadium Operations intern: Trevor Overmiller
Stadium Operations intern: Darin Brown
Marketing intern: Brianna Danehey
Baseball Operations intern: Andy Chase
Radio Broadcaster: Will Reynolds

Tribune Staff

On cover: Top left: Trey Kissack pitches against the Hub City Hotshots July 18, 2018. Top right: Hastings Sodbusters celebrate their win over the Casper Horseheads Aug. 5, 2018, at Duncan Field. From left is Anthony De Santis, Tyler Daugherty, Alec Lee (obscured) and Justin Henry.

Ready for new adventures, memories with 2019 Sodbusters

I remember Sodbusters opening day a year ago as one of the more enjoyable days of my 23 years on this earth. (I'm young and better days are ahead, I know.)

As small scale as you can sit there and tell me it was, with 1,138 announced fans filling Duncan Field in our town of 25,000 people or so, it was a night I will never forget.

Justin Henry sparked the crowd's interest with a fifth inning mammoth home run over the left-field fence. "A wood bat blast? Yeah, right," many familiar with Duncan Field and its reputation as a baseball graveyard scoffed before the start of the season.

Also featured was local talent Vinny Schmidt, who dazzled on the mound for five innings and struck out seven batters.

But the most exciting part was the perfect introduction of the team to the town.

Jake Oblas (he's returning!) launched a bases-clearing walk-off double over the head of the Badlands Big Sticks' right fielder in the bottom of the ninth for the franchise's first victory.

In my book, there's no better way to open a season. For those of you reading this and asking, "What about a perfect game or no-hitter?" my answer is no,

not on opening night. Those types of games are certainly fun to witness, but Oblas' hit sent a shock through me in the booth that I had never felt before.

Another moment that stood out was Shawn Barrowdale's bomb off the scoreboard in Dickinson, N.D., against the Big Sticks that provided Hastings the lead in the top of the ninth. That road trip was ridiculous for Shawn as he hit two homers in a June 13, 2018, game at Spearfish, S.D. just a few days prior.

Or how about Kolby Force's grand slam at Duncan Field, also against the Spearfish Sasquatch — a first in franchise history.

Or, on the mound, Trey Kissack had his 14 strikeout game, where he allowed no hits, in just seven innings of work.

The memories are still fresh from the 2018 season, but there will undoubtedly be countless more made beginning May 24.

Who knows, maybe I will have to abandon my broadcast booth in the sixth inning again and find myself coaching in the dugout wearing an absent player's oversized uniform after the rest of the coaching staff gets ejected.

Have I mentioned I have a cool job that allows me to experience all of this? Not to brag, but I have the

privilege of working as a sports writer for the Hastings Tribune alongside some incredible people who provide me the opportunity to do what I do for the Sodbusters, too.

I literally get the best of both worlds. I travel through the Midwest all summer (albeit on a hot, sweaty charter bus) and my office is a baseball diamond. I see what other towns, and even some cities, have to offer in terms of local cuisine, bars, and baseball stadiums.

But the best part is, I get to tell stories of it all — in the Tribune as well as on the team's website as its radio broadcaster, which I'm lucky to have been invited back by Bryan Frew for season two.

I'm looking forward to opening day this year. A handful of guys from last year's squad are coming back, and it will be good to see them, but I'm most excited to meet all the newbies.

New memorable moments, new inside jokes

to laugh at, new places to visit. It's all there for another incredible season.

By mid-August I hope to be sitting in the press box of Duncan Field calling the Clark Division championship. Actually, it doesn't matter if it's at Duncan or not. I just hope Hastings is playing.

Will Reynolds is the Tribune's Sodbusters beat writer. He can be reached at 402-303-1429 or wreynolds@hastingstribune.com.



Will Reynolds

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