

SPORTS

MEN'S BASEBALL PREVIEW

Voyageurs seek 20-plus wins, state tourney trip

RRCC opens season next week in Florida

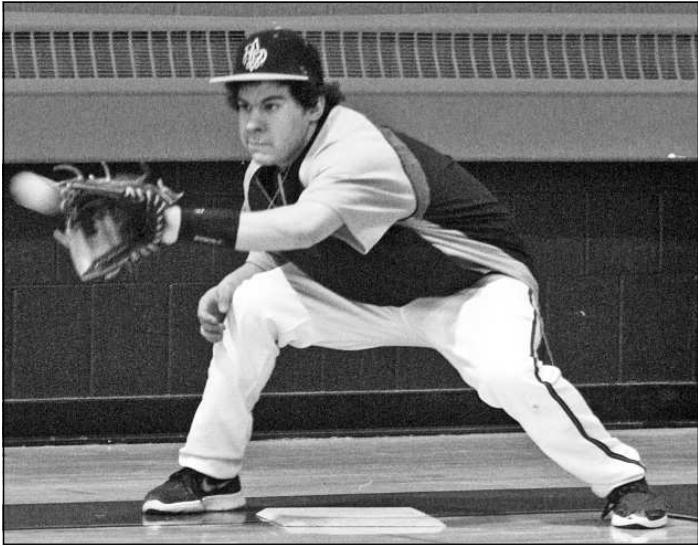
BY KEVIN BONESKE  
Sports Editor

Though more than two feet of snow are now on the ground outside in International Falls, the Rainy River Community College men's baseball team has been preparing inside for what it hopes will be a season with 20 or more wins and a district/state tournament appearance.

Josh Koenig is entering his fifth season as the Voyageurs' head coach after coming off a weather-hampered season in 2013 when RRCC finished 14-19 overall and 8-4 in Minnesota College Athletic Conference Northern Division games.

The Voyageurs, who entered last year's MCAC Northern Division double-elimination playoff tournament as the No. 4 seed, missed out on the state tournament after defeating Vermilion in the first game, 5-1, and then losing to top-seeded Mesabi Range, 4-1, defeating Fond du Lac, 11-1, and losing to Northland, 5-4.

Koenig, who was named the 2013 MCAC Northern Division Coach of the Year, lists six players among his key loses from last season. They include Riley Acra (second baseman), Ty Paddock (pitcher/outfielder), Bryn Redhead (catcher) ,



The Voyageurs' Victor Rodriguez of Boise, Idaho, catches the ball during infield practice Wednesday in the RRCC gym.

Jamall Hudson (outfielder), Angel Hernandez Jr. (shortstop) and Reece Lanier (pitcher).

Acra was named to the MCAC All-State team and MCAC All-Northern Division team. He also was an MCAC Northern Division Player of the Week in 2013.

Paddock was named to the MCAC All-Northern Division team. He also was an NJCAA Division III Pitcher of the Week and MCAC Northern Division Player of the Week in 2013.

Lanier was named an MCAC Northern Division Pitcher of the Week in 2013.

Koenig's list of top returning athletes includes

Gino Strebing (pitcher), Robert Parrish III (pitcher/infielder), Makana Canda (infielder), Ben Churilla (outfielder), Drew Birss (outfielder) and Brett Bateman (outfielder).

Parrish received NJCAA Division III Player of the Week honors last year.

Strebing, Canda and Churilla are captains on the 2014 team.

"Hopefully (we'll) make it to state," Churilla said. "Last year, we were damn close, so that's our goal."

"I feel like we're getting closer as a team than we were last year," Canda said. "Last year, we fell a little further apart."



STAFF PHOTOS BY KEVIN BONESKE

The Voyageurs' Ben Churilla of Coon Rapids relays a throw in Wednesday's baseball practice in the RRCC gym.

"I think this year it's going to be a little bit better," Strebing said. "That's what we're hoping for. I think we have a lot more pitching."

Koenig said this year's team has a pitching staff with "the most depth that we have had in the five years of our program."

"As long as we stay healthy, our defense should be strong at the corners in the infield and (have) solid speed and experience in the outfield," he said.

However, Koenig said he is concerned this season, as always, about hitting with consistency and find-

ing ways to bring runners to the plate when they are in scoring position.

"We will be a younger team this year with 13 freshmen on the roster," he said. "They will need to develop into key roles for our team early in the season," he said.

Along with continuing to "build and develop a quality program on and off the field," Koenig said the team goals this season include winning 20-plus games, earning a home playoff series and qualifying for the district/state tournament.

"We are excited to get on the field and see what this group of players can accomplish this season and we look for this group of players to keep their perspectives, stay focused on their process, work hard, and strive for excellence both on and off the field," he said.

Koenig said he is looking forward to "getting started with our season and seeing the finished product on the field," as well as "seeing the snow melt away quickly."

He said the teams to watch out for this season include Itasca and Mesabi Range.

The Voyageurs will be on their annual trip to Florida next week and open the season Sunday in St. Petersburg, Fla., with a doubleheader against Minnesota State-Fergus Falls.

ICE ARENA SCHEDULE 3/10-3/16

Date	Time	Location	Comments
3-10	4:15pm-5:15pm	Bronco Arena	Second Year Bantam/High School Boys Open Hockey
3-10	6:30pm-7:30pm	Bronco Arena	Girls U10/12 & High School Girls Open Hockey
3-10	7:45pm-8:30pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Juniors
3-10	8:30pm-9:45pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Grand Finale Seniors
3-10	4:10pm-5:10pm	Kerry Park Arena	Second Year Mighty Mite/First Year Squirt Hockey
3-10	5:20pm-6:20pm	Kerry Park Arena	First Year Pee Wee/Second Year Squirt Hockey
3-10	6:30pm-7:30pm	Kerry Park Arena	Second Year Pee Wee/First Year Bantam Hockey
3-10	7:45pm-9:00pm	Kerry Park Arena	Open Adult Hockey
3-11	6:10am-6:35am	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Careers/Dar's Solos
3-11	6:35am-7:10am	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Hollywood
3-11	7:10am-7:50am	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Study
3-11	4:15pm-5:15pm	Bronco Arena	Second Year Bantam/High School Boys Open Hockey
3-11	5:15pm-6:15pm	Bronco Arena	Second Year Pee Wee/First Year Bantam Hockey
3-11	6:30pm-7:30pm	Bronco Arena	Girls U10/12 & High School Girls Open Hockey
3-11	7:45pm-8:15pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Sailboat (Basic 6)/Orphanage (Basic 5)
3-11	8:15pm-8:45pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Egypt (Basic 7)/Cruise (Basic 8)
3-11	8:45pm-9:45pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: All Senior
3-11	4:10pm-5:10pm	Kerry Park Arena	Termite Practice & EQUIPMENT HAND-IN AFTER PRACTICE
3-11	5:30pm-6:15pm	Kerry Park Arena	Squirt Gold Parent/Child Game
3-11	6:15pm-7:00pm	Kerry Park Arena	Squirt Purple Parent/Child Game
3-11	7:15pm-8:15pm	Kerry Park Arena	Bantam A Parent/Child Game
3-11	8:30pm-9:30pm	Kerry Park Arena	Open Adult Hockey
3-12	6:10am-6:50am	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Foreign
3-12	6:50am-7:50am	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Game/Dance
3-12	4:00pm-4:30pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Grad Senior
3-12	4:30pm-5:30pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Juniors
3-12	5:30pm-6:30pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: All Seniors
3-12	6:45pm-7:45pm	Bronco Arena	Second Year Bantam/High School Boys Open Hockey
3-12	8:00pm-9:30pm	Bronco Arena	Open Adult Hockey
3-12	4:10pm-5:10pm	Kerry Park Arena	First Year Squirt/Second Year Mighty Mite Hockey
3-12	5:20pm-6:20pm	Kerry Park Arena	First Year Pee Wee/Second Year Squirt Hockey
3-12	6:30pm-7:30pm	Kerry Park Arena	First Year Bantam/Second Year Pee Wee Hockey

Date	Time	Location	Comments
3-12	7:40pm-8:45pm	Kerry Park Arena	Girls U10/12 & High School Girls Hockey
3-13	6:10am-7:00am	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Grand Finale Seniors
3-13	7:00am-7:40am	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Dance
3-13	4:15pm-5:15pm	Bronco Arena	Second Year Bantam/High School Boys Open Hockey
3-13	5:15pm-6:15pm	Bronco Arena	Second Year Pee Wee/First Year Bantam Hockey
3-13	6:30pm-7:00pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: College (Basic 2)/Marry (Basic 2)
3-13	7:00pm-7:30pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Alps (Basic 3)/Theme (Basic 4)
3-13	7:30pm-8:15pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Synchro
3-13	8:30pm-9:45pm	Bronco Arena	Hamms Bears Practice
3-13	4:10pm-5:10pm	Kerry Park Arena	Second Year Mighty Mite/First Year Squirt Hockey
3-13	5:20pm-6:20pm	Kerry Park Arena	Second Year Squirt/First Year Pee Wee Hockey
3-13	6:30pm-7:30pm	Kerry Park Arena	Girls U10/12 & High School Girls Open Hockey
3-13	7:45pm-9:00pm	Kerry Park Arena	Open Adult Hockey
3-14	6:10am-6:50am	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Cosmetic/Family
3-14	6:50am-7:50am	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Shelly's Solos
3-14	4:00pm-11:00pm	Bronco Arena	Men's Hockey Tournament Games
3-14	4:00pm-11:00pm	Kerry Park Arena	Men's Hockey Tournament Games
3-15	8:30am-7:00pm	Bronco Arena	Men's Hockey Tournament Games
3-15	8:30am-7:00pm	Kerry Park Arena	Men's Hockey Tournament Games
3-16	9:00am-3:00pm	Bronco Arena	Men's Hockey Tournament Games
3-16	3:30pm-4:00pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: College (Basic 2)
3-16	4:00pm-4:30pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Child (Basic 1)
3-16	4:30pm-5:00pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Adopt (Snow Plow Sam)
3-16	5:00pm-5:30pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Marry (Basic 2)
3-16	5:30pm-6:00pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Alps (Basic 3)
3-16	6:15pm-6:45pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Theme (Basic 4)
3-16	6:45pm-7:15pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Orphanage (Basic 5)
3-16	7:15pm-7:45pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Sailboat (Basic 6)
3-16	7:45pm-8:15pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Egypt (Basic 7)
3-16	8:15pm-8:45pm	Bronco Arena	Figure Skating: Cruise (Basic 8)
3-16	9:00am-3:00pm	Kerry Park Arena	Men's Hockey Tournament Games

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