

March 16, 2019 - Anthony Knittel to lead Minford's baseball program

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MINFORD — Over his two seasons as Minford's head baseball coach, it was evident that the knowledge of Aaron Hopper and his staff made a serious impact on the Falcons' roster members.

The fact that the program followed up a district championship appearance in 2017 with its first outright Southern Ohio Conference title in 50 years and an OHSAA Final Four appearance in 2018 — the school's first such appearance in the sport — makes that point crystal clear.

But unfortunately, some things don't stay the same.

Despite a successful two-year tenure, Hopper, who went 24-3 last year as the Falcons' skipper, resigned his post for the betterment of his family.

Fortunately for Minford, its newest head coach served not only on Hopper's staff for the last two seasons, but under the legendary coaching mind of Tim Martin before that.

Anthony Knittel, who stood out as a baseball talent under Chris Rapp at West before graduating in 2011, becomes Minford's coach after three seasons as an assistant.

For Knittel, the opportunity to lead a program in his own way — especially one that has employed two of his mentors at the same spot — is a blessing.

Anthony Knittel makes his head coaching debut at Minford on March 25, hosting Zane Trace.

“It’s an honor to be the head coach for such an outstanding program,” Knittel said. “Honestly, I just want to continue the winning tradition that has been here since Tim Martin was the head coach. It’s very exciting for me to go from assistant coach to the big guy in charge.”

Knittel has a baseball pedigree that extends a country mile.

The former Senator was not only a four-year letterman under Rapp, but a successful collegiate athlete at Marietta and Rio Grande — he helped win two national championships at the former stop.

Since that time, Knittel has served as an assistant for Martin — who served as a scout for the Cardinals, Expos [now Nationals], Marlins and the Red Sox — and Hopper, who won two national titles with Knittel at Marietta when the pair were teammates there.

Add that experience with the fact that the Knittel family is a baseball family through and through, as evidenced by Anthony’s younger brothers [Brady and Anthony] playing the sport at the collegiate level, and it’s clear that winning baseball games is one of Knittel’s primary goals.

“Those three guys right there [Hopper, Martin and Rapp] have made a huge impact on my life,” Knittel said. “With Rapp, it was an honor to be able to play under him. He taught me to believe in myself and how to be a leader on and off of the field. Martin taught me perseverance, and when things didn’t go your way, to keep working hard because it will all pay off if you keep on the grind. I love to be able to say I’ve coached in the same program as Tim Martin. It’s such an honor. Being able to coach with one of your best friends was an honor, too. Aaron and I played college ball together, which he took me under his wing to help me adjust to the college level. The memories that coach Hopper and I have had together are unforgettable, from being teammates to coaches. I have to thank those three guys for everything that they’ve done for me in my life. Now, I can take what they taught me and apply it to the Minford program.”

It certainly helps that Minford returns a litany of talent from last year’s group. Overall, the Falcons lost just one senior starter — first baseman Payton Davis.

Luke Lindamood, the team’s catcher and arguably its heart and soul, is already committed to West Virginia Tech and is as good of a two-way player as anybody

around. Ethan Lauder and Elijah Vogelsong-Lewis are not only excellent control pitchers, but fill much-needed slots at third base and right field, respectively.

Beyond the trio, Brayden Davis and Darius Jordan bring speed and standout gloves to left and center field, while Nathan McCormick's athleticism at shortstop is second to none. Then, there's Bailey Rowe and Reid Shultz, who could each be called Mr. Utility for their work and presences in the field at different positions.

When you add in the promising abilities of Matthew Risner, among additional youngsters, the 2019 season could have as much upside as any in school history.

Yes, you read that correctly — the school's entire baseball history.

Knittel makes his head coaching debut on March 25, hosting Zane Trace.

"These kids are such hard workers and strive to be the best they can be. There is so much motivation because everyone on this team wants to bring home a state championship," Knittel said. "However, we just have to take one pitch, one out, and one game at a time and let everything else take care of itself. We are very excited to get everything rolling next week."