

# BEST SEASON EVER FOR HIGHLANDERS BASEBALL

— A HARBINGER OF  
WHAT'S TO COME



(Above) Highlanders catcher Phil Resciniti went 6 for 8 during the ECAC playoffs to complete the 2005 season with a team-best .361 batting average. Resciniti, who was named to the second team All-Northeast Region by the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association, led the Highlanders in runs (28), hits (53), doubles (11), homeruns (4), runs batted in (33), slugging (.531), and on-base percentage (.422). He was also honored as the 2004-05 Most Outstanding Male Athlete at NJIT's annual athletics awards dinner in May.

(Left) Head Coach Brian Callahan

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THE HIGHLANDERS BASEBALL TEAM HAD ITS best season ever in Division II play.

Coach Brian Callahan guided the Highlanders to their first Central Atlantic Collegiate Conference (CACC) regular-season championship and the top seed in the CACC Tournament. Six of Callahan's players were named all-CACC, and NJIT also won the league's Team Sportsmanship Award.

The Highlanders finished first in the CACC with an 18-6 league record. The title continued a streak of improving in the CACC standings each season under Callahan, and was the first top finish for the program since it captured first place in the Skyline Conference in 1994.

The NJIT baseball team concluded the entire 2005 season with a won-lost record of 22-20 including a runner-up finish in the post-season Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) Division II Championship. NJIT accomplished its best winning percentage in its eight years as a member of the division, and its best overall since 1996.

## Coach of the Year

For the second consecutive season, Callahan was named CACC Coach of the Year in balloting by the

conference's other head coaches. Callahan, 30, was one of the nation's youngest head coaches when NJIT hired him in 2000. Ever since, he has helped the team improve.

"It's a great honor to be voted coach of the year," Callahan says, "but I don't see it as an award for me but for the team. The players and my fellow NJIT coaches share in the award. If they didn't work hard, my coaching would never have been noticed. It's my job to motivate the players, but they are smart and self-motivating so it's a pleasure to coach them." Nearly half of his players — 12 out of 28 — were named NJIT scholar-athletes, and two were named to the CACC All-Academic Team.

A love of baseball has coursed through Callahan's veins since he was a boy. His father played baseball in high school and college, and Callahan, who lives in Bayonne, grew up to become a four-year letter winner at St. Peter's College. As a senior catcher, he was named to the Metro-Atlantic Athletic Conference All-Academic Team. From 1996 to 1998, he was the assistant baseball coach at St. Peter's. He is also a member of the St. Peter's Intramural Hall of Fame.

Callahan loves coaching the Highlanders, and one development that has been a special motivation for him and his team was NJIT President Robert Altenkirch's decision to negotiate a multi-year contract with the Newark Bears that allows the Highlanders to play their home games at one of the best minor league stadiums in the region: Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium. "Not many college teams get to call a 6,000 seat minor league stadium their home field," Callahan says. "It's a great benefit for the players, our fans and our recruiting efforts. We are excited about continuing to play there in the future."

### **A Major Move**

Fans of Highlanders baseball and players alike have another reason to be excited about the upcoming 2006 season. The NJIT Board of Trustees has approved elevating the university's entire athletic program from Division II to Division I. Reclassifying to Division I is a four-year process, and during a school's transitional first season — beginning in September 2005 for NJIT — teams play a Division II schedule but follow Division I rules, explains NJIT Athletic Director Lenny Kaplan. And starting in 2007, Highlanders baseball will begin competing against some of the best teams in the Northeast.

"The success we attained in Division II play will help us succeed in Division I," Kaplan says. "The

move up will allow us to play higher-caliber, more recognizable schools such as Rutgers, Seton Hall and Monmouth. The competition will be more intense."

Competing in Division I has been a goal of the university since 1997, when the program was elevated from Division III to Division II, says Joel Bloom, dean of Albert Dorman Honors College and vice president for academic and student services, to whom the athletic department reports. "When we moved from NCAA Division III interscholastic competition to Division II," Bloom recalls, "it was with the intent of becoming a Division I university. The move was to parallel the planned growth of NJIT in enrollment, graduates, facilities, research, and the transition from a predominantly commuting campus to a residential one. Under Bob Altenkirch's leadership, we are working to accelerate the move to Division I."

Orchestration of this key transition began in the fall of 2003, when NJIT received NCAA approval to elevate its men's soccer program to NCAA Division I, and the team played their first Division I schedule last year. Also in 2003, men's and women's cross-country track and women's fencing were added to NJIT's sports program for a total of 15 sports, all of which are part of the transition to Division I. Kaplan says that all of the teams will be playing full Division I schedules in the fall of 2006.

The university has also increased athletic scholarship dollars in each of the last three years, thanks in part to a fundraising campaign that many alumni have generously supported. Not only is this an important aspect of Division I membership, but it is important for building an athletics program that offers many benefits to the NJIT community. In Altenkirch's view, intercollegiate athletics is an integral part of the residential college experience, one that unites student-athletes, non-athletes, alumni, faculty and staff.

"Intercollegiate athletics also helps to engage the surrounding community," says Altenkirch. "As NJIT continues to grow academically, and as a residential university, strengthening the athletics program through the transition to Division I will allow us to align the university athletically with our academic peers. It will also enable us to recruit the best and brightest student-athletes, improve athletics facilities available to the entire NJIT community, gain regional and national visibility, and build strong linkages with students that will carry over to their days as alumni." ■