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LSU Baseball: Pre-Season Preview

Currently ranked as number 4 in the D1 Baseball 2024 Preseason Top 25 poll, LSU falls two spots short of Florida, which, in June of 2023, they beat to grasp the D1 College Baseball National Championship.

It is no secret that LSU Head Coach Jay Johnson has big expectations for the 2024 Tigers, yet he knows the difference between plausible and possible. "We're not defending anything. When you're being hunted, you're kind of on defense. We're not doing that. We're attacking 2024." Coach Johnson said during a 2024 Media Day conference on January 24th. The big question that looms on LSU and college baseball fans' minds is how far this team will get this season. With the ups and downs of the 2023 season eventually leading to victory in Omaha but the loss of big-name players to the Major Leagues, does this team have what it takes to pull things together for back-to-back College World Series titles?

With #1 and #2 picks in the MLB Draft, LSU had lots to be proud of in this baseball off-season. But with that came the reality of "big cleats" to fill on the team. Coach Johnson wasted no time scouting and recruiting players throughout the end of 2023 and leading up to the 2024 season. He even stated that while in Omaha for the College World Series in June, he was looking for potential players and was already gearing up before the hardware came home to Baton Rouge. Some of the recruits joining LSU this year are expected to make explosive moves early on within the season and program, while others have to step up and fill in the gaps on the roster that may not be as easy to handle.

Two notable players acquired from the transfer portal going into this season are Mac Bingham, an outfielder who pursued baseball at the University of Arizona despite being drafted directly from high school by the Chicago Cubs in 2019, and Michael Braswell III, a Junior Shortstop coming to Baton Rouge following two seasons at South Carolina. With the dynamic plays of Jordan Thompson gone to the majors, Coach Jay Johnson was eager to get Braswell to Baton Rouge to close that important and busy defensive position, and come Opening Day, there will be many eyes on Braswell. Along with these field players being added to the roster, notable pitching options are joining the team this year in the forms of Gage Jump, the lefty transfer from UCLA, and Luke Holman, the right-handed Junior trading in his Alabama Crimson for LSU Purple and Gold.

Speaking of pitching for the 2024 season, there is no doubt there will be a major loss felt on the mound in the shapes of Paul Skenes and Ty Floyd. Still, with players like Thatcher Herd, Nate Ackenhausen, and Griffin Herring preparing for their chance to prove themselves, there will be a passionate and fast-paced pitching roster Coach Johnson and pitching coach Coach Nate Yeskie can rely on throughout the season.

With big strengths like Tommy White, Hayden Travinski, and Alex Milazzo coming back this season, it will be important for those sporting the 2023 CWS ring to help newcomers and strive to make a seamless transition into working as a unit and making this season more about the team than the titles. One matter facing this team as a whole is the schedule coming their way. With teams such as the VMI Keydettes and Central Arkansas Bears coming to Alex Box early in the Tigers season, it will be important to work through those “growing pains” expected within the squad while there is still time to grow. If LSU fails to do so, there will be rude awakenings when facing a CWS rematch at home against Florida in Week 7 and a weekend in Knoxville against Tennessee in April.

Although Coach Johnson stated that the team is not thinking about defending titles, LSU remains a real contender for a back-to-back visit to Omaha. The pitchers must pitch at the top of their game, the defense and offense must be on track, the hitting should not be overlooked, and the overall player mentality and team comradery must be at its all-time best. With this recipe, this 44-player team might have what it takes to become LSU's next champions.

LSU Baseball Opening Day will take place January 16th, 2024, at 2 pm CST against Virginia Military Institute in Alex Box Stadium, Skip Bertman Field.