

## Pro Connection Runs Deep At Tate

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A comprehensive list is likely hard to come by, but if one were compiled that tallied which high school programs produced the most major league players, Tate High in Cantonment, Fla.; would likely be among the leaders. The Aggies have had almost 50 players drafted—either out of high school or college—and six of them have played in the big leagues.

"To me, Tate High School is about community," head coach Greg Blackmon said. "It has a tradition of excellence. We've had a Hall of Famer, all stars. We've had captains in the Marine Corps. They're successful. Outside the realm of baseball, this program has influence."

Among the big league alumni are Hall of Fame right-hander Don Sutton, third baseman Travis Fryman and shortstop Jay Bell, but the reach into pro ball extends off the field as well. They also have a former player, Fred Robbins that plays defensive tackle for the St. Louis Rams.

Deric Ladnier, the Royals scouting director from 2001-2008, is now a special assistant to the general manager for the Nationals and graduated from Tate in 1982. Mac Seibert, the Midwest cross checker for the Mets, also played for the Aggies in the early 1980s. Seibert, along with Bell and Blackmon, was a part of the 1984 team that won a state championship and the first mythical national championship for high school baseball. Seibert's son, Mac IV, is a senior at Tate and Fryman's son, Mason, is a sophomore.

"A big part of the success is that when the guys that leave here, give back," Blackmon said. "These guys work year-round within their organizations and when they get time off, they spend it back at Tate working with the kids."

Tate just finished the regular season and starts the district tournament this week. Blackmon was the head coach from 1998-2005 before taking a coaching job at Pensacola (Fla.) JC, but returned to fill the position this season.

"Our goal was to initiate a disciplined program and the kids have bought in," Blackmon said. "We never expected to be sitting here at 20-4. That aspect was a shock."

The Aggie offense is being led by junior outfielder Austin Quina, who is hitting .474/. 562/. 544 with 19 RBIs while the pitching staff is enjoying success with youth.

"Quina has been an offensive juggernaut," Blackmon said. "Everybody pitching except one or two guys is an underclassman."

The playoffs are underway and anything can happen in single elimination, but this group of Tate baseball players will look to add to the program's seven state titles and connection to professional baseball.