

Salisbury School Boasts Top Rotation

By **Clint Longenecker** – *Baseball America*

Perennially one of most successful high school programs in the country, the Salisbury (Conn.) School has a storied track record of success that dates back to 1904.

Yet this year's team might be the most talented in quite some time, headlined by one of the most talented rotations in the country. Salisbury's staff features four Division I commits, three pitchers who can reach the 90s with their fastballs and a marquee prospect, Austin DeCarr, who could go in the top three rounds of the draft.

An elite academic prep school, Salisbury has won games and produced college players at one of the best rates in the country. The school has produced 23 players who have advanced to the college or pro ranks in the last three years and 40 since 2007.

The Knights have 13 seniors this year, and eight are committed to play in college, with seven to Division I schools. This group has known nothing but success in recent years, with a combined record of 55-1, including an undefeated 34-game season two years ago when it produced a run differential of plus-319. Fifth-year head coach John Toffey entered the season with a .949 career winning percentage.

"We have won the last two conference championships but we haven't had a team with this kind of depth top to bottom, especially to have the top three guys getting looks from major league teams for the draft," Toffey said.

Talented Pitchers

The rotation is fronted by a pair of righthanders who have taken atypical paths to reach Salisbury, as post-graduate students who obtained their high school degrees from Massachusetts high schools in 2013.

DeCarr was one of the top prep quarterbacks in New England at Xaverian Brothers High (Foxboro, Mass.) before having a bone spur removed from his throwing elbow in the fall of his junior season. After touching 90 mph before the injury, DeCarr's velocity diminished upon his return to the diamond.

"Last spring I wasn't really anywhere near getting picked in the draft," DeCarr said. "There weren't any scouts at any of my games. Last spring I was mostly 85-88."

After he wasn't drafted following his senior season, DeCarr saw his velocity increase steadily early in the summer before the showcase circuit. In the first inning of his outing at East Coast Pro, DeCarr sat 90-92 mph, touching 93.

DeCarr quickly became a highly coveted commodity. More than five teams with money left in their draft bonus pools (which can be used to sign nondrafted free agents) made strong runs at DeCarr, who bypassed a significant signing bonus to come to Salisbury.

The 19-year-old worked out under trainer Eric Cressey during the offseason after a strong summer.

“Austin was a Division I-caliber quarterback and his dad was actually a quarterback and pitcher in college,” Cressey said. “Austin is a unique player because he was actually a shortstop and third baseman mostly throughout high school, and he has taken up pitching late going into his senior year. He only had about 80 innings on the mound since Little League. He was a little bit of a late bloomer. It is a quick arm and pretty special.”

“The body looks great. He looks really strong but also trimmer,” a National League scout said. “You can tell he really put in a lot of work this offseason.”

The large-framed, 6-foot-2 DeCarr put on more than 10 pounds of muscle in the offseason and has a powerful build at 220 pounds. He has shown even better velocity this spring, touching 96 mph and sitting 90-93 at times.

Increased stamina has been critical for DeCarr, who lost velocity over multiple innings on the showcase circuit, falling to 86-88 mph at the end of his East Coast Pro outing, and when pitching out of the stretch.

“He has shown a better ability to hold his velocity deep into games,” Toffey said. “He was 91-92 in the sixth inning of his last outing.”

Because of his age and Clemson commitment, DeCarr has similarities to lefthander Chris Dwyer, who has reached the majors with the Royals. Dwyer attended Salisbury for a post-graduate year, then attended Clemson for a season before being drafted as an eligible freshman. Scouts have also compared DeCarr to Reds 2013 third-rounder Mark Armstrong, a New York prep, as a strong-bodied, multi-sport athlete with velocity.

The separator for DeCarr is his curveball, which is at least an average pitch, flashing plus at its best. The key to his draft stock (and scouts’ confidence in him as a starter) will be the development of his seldom-used changeup, which scouts grade as a below-average offering, and his strike-throwing ability. But his fastball/curveball combo gives him the floor of a power arm out of the pen.

Quick-armed righthander Paul Campbell, who graduated from Malden (Mass.) Catholic, is also committed to Clemson and sat 86-88 mph at the Area Code Games last summer before seeing a velocity jump this spring. The 6-foot-1, 180-pounder has room to fill out.

“He has consistently been in that 88-91 range, touching some 92s this spring,” Toffey said. “He has a quick, loose arm, throws strikes and attacks the strike zone with good secondary stuff.”

Depth On The Staff

The third member of the rotation is 6-foot-3, 200-pound righthander Will Montgomerie, who touched 91 mph at the Perfect Game Showdown in early April. The Connecticut commit’s lower arm slot and natural arm-side run on his fastball make him a tough

matchup. Massachusetts commit Scott Hovey, a 6-foot-3, 215-pound righthander with a fastball that reaches the high 80s, rounds out Salisbury's rotation.

Shortstop Will Toffey is the top position player on the team and the youngest brother of his head coach, John, who is the eldest of five Toffey siblings. The Vanderbilt commit is a draftable talent who played in the Area Code Games and has garnered significant scouting attention this spring. Toffey, who is also one of the top prep hockey players in the Northeast and the captain of the school's hockey team, had to decide which sport to pursue at the next level and relied upon the advice of John, who was drafted in both baseball and hockey and played minor league hockey.

"I had to decide last August which sport I wanted to do because I had offers for both hockey and baseball, and I honestly liked them both equally," Will Toffey said. "My brother played both in college, and he said was how hard it was to improve while playing both in college. So his advice was to pick one in college and go with it."

Currently a shortstop, Toffey has a strong, 6-foot-2 frame and above-average arm that likely fit best at third at the next level. He is a below-average runner out of the box but has a quick lefthanded stroke, strike zone knowledge and at least average raw power to his pull side. Toffey, who practiced with Cotuit of the Cape Cod League last summer, is featured prominently in many of the pictures in Cotuit coach Mike Roberts' book, "Baserunning." Toffey has intriguing upside because of his limited baseball reps as a multi-sport athlete from a cold-weather state.

Toffey, DeCarr and Campbell all participated in the Area Code Games, tying Salisbury for the most of any school at the premier showcase event of the summer. Salisbury has been a pipeline for the event with seven participants since 2007.

Salisbury has a strong nucleus of underclassmen that could carry the Area Code Games torch. Junior third baseman George Hewitt is the younger brother of the last first-rounder out of Salisbury, Anthony Hewitt. Junior lefthander Jacob Lamb is 6-foot-5 and has a fastball that has reached the upper 80s. Versatile catcher/outfielder Ryan January is a sophomore with an intriguing skill set.

Although the Knights have dropped one of their first 12 games this season, they have bludgeoned their competition with a plus-85 run differential. They have allowed just 1.5 runs a game with shutouts in nearly half (45 percent) of their games.