

MDC baseball reloads, eyes return to series

BY WALTER VILLA - SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD

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David Palenzuela said it was the most fun he has had in his life.

The Miami Dade College baseball standout was referring to the Sharks' run last spring to the 2014 Junior College World Series. The Sharks finished second in the country, making it all the way to the championship game in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Now that the 2015 season is almost upon us, the Sharks are hoping to return to Grand Junction.

"Of course I feel some pressure," said Palenzuela, a 6-2, 205-pound sophomore first baseman from Monsignor Pace High School. "We've lost more than half our team from last year. But our coaches are really good about recruiting new players."

That coaching staff, led by Danny Price, returns six key players from last season's team, including Palenzuela, who batted .360 and hit third in the lineup.

Other key returners include starting shortstop Bryan Colon, who made just seven errors last season, left fielder Delvy Palmeiro, second baseman Jonathan Morales, and left-handed pitchers Robert Evans and Jonathan Bermudez.

Among the top newcomers are right-handed pitcher Colyn O'Connell, a sophomore, and freshman outfielders Brandon Vicens, Kevin Williams and Chris Bec.

Two transfers will compete at catcher — Dakota Robbins from Auburn and Nelson Mompierre from FIU.

O'Connell, a 6-5, 220-pounder, was drafted in the 19th round of the 2012 MLB Draft by the Cleveland Indians. He played for Dunedin High at the time and has since come back from Tommy John surgery. He is now throwing faster than ever, between 92 and 95 mph.

"That didn't just happen on its own," said O'Connell, who recently signed a scholarship to play next year at Florida Atlantic University. "It took a lot of hard work."

Vicens, a freshman from Plantation American Heritage, is another talented player. He was drafted in the 35th round by the Cincinnati Reds last year, but he turned down the pros to come to MDC.

He joins a potent Sharks lineup.

"Last year," Palenzuela said, "Coach Price let us grow our beards as long as we kept winning. This year, I hope we can all grow our beards as long as Santa Claus."

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Chris Corchiani Jr., a rarely-used walk-on for N.C. State, was in Miami on Thursday when the Wolfpack played the Hurricanes. Corchiani, a 6-0 point guard, did not get in the game. His father, Chris Corchiani, was a legendary point guard at Hialeah-Miami Lakes High and at N.C. State, where he left school in 1991 as the NCAA's all-time leader in assists.

WOMEN'S SOCCER

Mike Goodrich left Nova Southeastern after 16 years as coach and is now running the team at Broward College. NSU replaced Goodrich with John Constable, who is just the fourth Sharks coach since the soccer program began in 1995.

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Jassany Williams, the Hurricanes' 6-2 center, is fifth in the Atlantic Coast Conference with 2.5 blocks per game. She had an amazing stretch earlier this season in which she blocked 13 shots in a span of 26 minutes.