ECU club team reaches new heights

By Ronnie Woodward  
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When Joe Caracci took over the East Carolina club baseball program, he thought it would take three or four years to get the team where he wanted it to be.

This season, the product on the field is proving Caracci right.

The ECU club team has reached unprecedented heights this season, recently winning the southern division of the Mid Atlantic Conference and gaining national recognition. ECU is ranked No. 2 in the nation.

“In my mind, I thought three or four years is what we needed,” said Caracci, who had coaching stints at Pitt Community College and Craven Community College prior to taking over the ECU club program. “There’s obviously talent at East Carolina and there was four years ago, but I have to make the program legitimate enough to the guys who attend East Carolina and don’t make the varsity (team). I have to make it worth their while and worth their time because it is very time consuming.

“It just took some time to raise the competition level and the legitimacy and perception among the student body.”

Caracci is in his fourth season as the team’s coach and the program is in its fifth season overall. The team has improved every year under Caracci.

He said balancing the competitive nature within the team is the toughest thing about coaching the club program.

“Joe has been the catalyst for this program and he’s the perfect coach for this,” senior Adam Butler said.

Most of the players are plucked by Caracci after not making the varsity team during fall tryouts. Others hear about the team through word of mouth on campus.

“There’s nothing like coming to the field knowing that you’re going to have a good time, but also be upbeat and intense about the game,” outfielder M.J. Mackey said.

The team made the postseason for the first time last season. This year, Caracci has a group led by seniors that has a shot at winning a regional and making it to the National Club Baseball Association World Series. ECU will play in a regional in Chesapeake, Va., May 7-9.

“When we first started, it was a group of guys who wanted to play baseball and have fun,” Butler said. “It was semi-structured, but it wasn’t nearly what it is now. We’ve made leaps and bounds the past four years. We’ve progressed every year and club baseball has gotten more popular.”

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Club Team Roster: Adam Butler, Casey Ide, Chris Staton, Dennis Butts, Dustin Nutter, Jaryd Dubin, Jerrod Bornman, JT Tubeville, Korey Merritt, Nick Morrison, Seth Moorman, Matt Steele, Jack Hanley, Scott Walsh, Nash Blackley, Eric Kosco, Patrick Williams, Derek Carlyle, Ian Mottice, Bryant Hill, Ryan Harris, Kris Abshire, Logan Dunn, Nathan Farmer, Jeff Moretz, Landon Adams, Clabie Edmond, Patrick Murphy, MJ Mackey, Jamie McGhee, Daniel Martin, Andrew Danak, Alan Swain, Ryan Maroney, Heath Neilson, Payton Sauter, Evan Price, Jesse Randolph, Hunter Sprague, Matthew Hinkle, Josh Helms-Shermer and Stephen Huryz.