

The VOYAGER



JANUARY 2025



BOBCATS SOFTBALL PREVIEW

With a blend of vets and new faces, high expectations are set for Bobcats Softball.



BOBCATS BASEBALL PREVIEW

Bobcats Baseball aim for growth, success, and postseason excellence.



SWEET HOME CHICAGO!

Exploring diversity and unity through a Chicago class trip.



EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the first edition of The Voyager for 2025!

As we bid farewell to the holiday season and the warmth of Christmas memories, we step into a new year brimming with possibilities. The holidays gave us time to reflect, recharge, and cherish moments with loved ones, setting a hopeful tone for what's ahead.

Yet, winter made its presence known shortly after the break, as two winter storms swept through, reminding us of both nature's beauty and its challenges. Through it all, our resilience and community spirit shone brightly.

Now, with 2025 unfolding, we look forward to fresh opportunities, new goals, and the chance to grow together. Let this be a year of perseverance, inspiration, and connection as we continue our journey with The Voyager!

- Derek Dunn



BOBCATS RELOADED: EXPERIENCE AND TALENT DRIVE 2025 AMBITIONS

With a mix of seasoned veterans and fresh faces, the Frontier Community College Bobcats Softball team is gearing up to chase their dreams. Head Coach Jeremy Ellis and his squad have their sights set on advancing beyond the first round of postseason play. Last season, they came tantalizingly close to reaching the program's first-ever second round. After a 7-1 win over Lincoln Trail in their opening game on May 4, the Bobcats dropped back-to-back 3-2 losses to the Statesmen, ending their season and postseason hopes.

The Bobcats wrapped up last season with an overall record of 26-27, just shy of the .500 mark. Despite early struggles, the team showed remarkable improvement in the latter half of the season, including a six-game winning streak in late April and a stretch of nine wins in ten games. Offensively, the team was a force, scoring 304 runs, posting a .327 batting average, a .381 on-base percentage, a .481 slugging percentage, and hitting 40 home runs.

Graduating sophomores Karlie Bean, Katherine Hibbitt, Ivie Edwards, Kaylee Halsema, and Addie Dungy left a lasting impact. Bean earned All-Region 24 First Team Infield honors, while Hibbitt was named All-Region 24 First Team Outfield.

"They stayed together as a team and believed in themselves," Ellis said. "We faced injuries and setbacks and lost a lot of one-run games, but we knew we could compete and win. Hitting, defense, and winning are all contagious, and we taught that group how to win. They were a joy to coach. Our sophomores were great leaders both on and off the field, and their contributions were invaluable."

Looking ahead to 2025, the Bobcats are optimistic with a strong returning core, a couple of impactful transfers, and a promising group of freshmen. The team also gained valuable experience during their autumn season, which featured games against several four-year schools.

“The fall is always a fun time for me as a coach,” Ellis said. “It can be challenging for the players, but playing against higher-level competition helps them see what it takes to compete. It’s all about gaining experience.”

Key returners include Rylan Jarboe (SO, INF), Maddalyn Griswold (SO, OF), AJ Hollowell (SO, OF), Kinley Sparks (SO, P/INF), Abby Cunningham (SO C/INF), Riley Cunningham (SO, P/INF), and Gracelin Shell (SO, C). Among the group, Hollowell, is an All-Region 24 Second Team Outfielder last season.

“They gained a lot of playing time and at-bats last year,” Ellis noted. “They focused on one position and settled in. Player development is key, and now they’re bigger, stronger, and faster.



L to R: Alicia Stanley, Kyndall Webb, and AJ Hollowell

If they perform like they did last year, we’ll be a very strong team.”

New additions include freshmen Lexi Miller (FR, P/OF), Emmy Vinson (FR, P/INF), Kyndall Webb (FR, INF), Alicia Stanley (FR, INF), Rylee Hendricks (FR, INF/OF), and transfers Bella Brownlee (Lincoln Land Community College - SO, INF) and Maci Warner (Indiana University Southeast - SO, P/INF).

“I’m really excited about our freshmen,” Ellis said. “They’re athletic, and their talent has a high ceiling. Some are adjusting to new positions to fill gaps, but they’ll be key contributors to our success.”

Ellis is equally enthusiastic about the transfers. “Maci is a powerhouse—an exceptional pitcher who can hit. Bella, despite dealing with injuries in the fall, will be a key player for us in the spring. Transfers can be unpredictable, but I’m thrilled with what we’ve added to the team.”

Experience and depth are two areas where Ellis sees significant growth in this year’s roster.

“We’re older and more experienced,” he said. “I told the team they’re the best group we’ve ever had. With strong pitching, solid defense, and freshmen stepping up offensively, this could be our deepest team yet. We may not hit 100 home runs like two years ago, but we have power, speed, and the ability to produce runs. I’m excited about what this team can achieve.”

The Bobcats' schedule features 60 games, including 44 Region 24 matchups. New to the schedule is Spoon River College, which recently joined Region 24 after transitioning from NJCAA Division II to Division I. Ellis sees the competition in the region growing stronger.

"The middle-tier teams are improving and putting pressure on top programs like Lake Land and John A. Logan," he said. "This is our tenth year as a program, and we've qualified for the postseason every year. My goal is to reach the final four. It's a double-elimination tournament, so pitching and depth are critical. Over the past ten years, Assistant Coach Marty Slover and I have worked to build a deeper roster to prepare for this moment."

Recruiting continues to be a cornerstone of Ellis's approach, with ten commits already secured for the class of 2025 from Illinois, southwestern Indiana, and western Kentucky.

"I feel like our program is taking a huge step forward," Ellis said. "We're constantly learning and improving, and players are now seeking us out. This recruiting class is outstanding, and I'm



Sophomores Kinley Sparks and Rylan Jarboe can't wait for the season to begin.

excited about their potential."

Ellis has also embraced social media as a vital recruiting tool, promoting live-streamed games on YouTube through Bobcat Nation and launching a team Instagram page to engage with prospective players.

"I'm not a tech-savvy guy," Ellis admitted, "but social media is where the kids are. You've got to meet them where they are and showcase your program. It's been a big help."

The Bobcats will kick off their season on Friday, February 14, at Northeast Mississippi Community College in Booneville, MS, as part of TigerFest. Their home opener is scheduled for Saturday, February 22, against the College of Lake County at Southwest Park. The full schedule is available at fccbobcats.com, and home games will be live-streamed on the Bobcat Nation YouTube channel.

For updates, follow Bobcat Nation on Facebook and Instagram. Content related to Bobcats Softball can be found on Facebook at FCC Bobcat Softball and on Instagram at [fccbobcatssoftball](https://www.instagram.com/fccbobcatssoftball).



FCC Calendar of Events

February 2025

- 1 & 2 - Baseball @ Wallace State Community College**
- 2 - Baseball at Wallace State Community College**
- 7 - Baseball hosts Oakland City University**
- 14, 15, 16 - Baseball at Vincennes Round Robin**
- 14, 15, 16 - Softball at NE Mississippi Community College for Tigerfest**
- 17 - FCC Campus closed - President's Day**
- 17 - Softball at Dyersburg State Community College**
- 18 - IECC Board of Trustees Meeting**
- 21 & 22 - Baseball hosts Lake Michigan College**
- 22 - Softball hosts College of Lake County**
- 23 - Softball hosts East Central College**
- 24 - Baseball at Oakland City University**
- 26 - Softball at St. Charles Community College**
- 28 - Midterm - Spring Semester**
- 28 - Baseball hosts Rock Valley College**





Bobcats Baseball team photo at Busch Stadium in St. Louis, MO. Photo credit: Luke Benfield

BOBCATS BASEBALL: MIXING EXPERIENCE WITH FRESH ENERGY

Coming off a 32-22 overall season last year, Coach Matt McCue and the Frontier Bobcats Baseball team are determined to achieve another successful campaign. The highlights of last season included a 17-12 record in Region 24, a nine-game winning streak in March, a top-10 national ranking in team GPA, and 17 players advancing to four-year schools—nine of whom joined Division 1 programs.

“On the field, we had a lot of success. Truthfully, I think we underachieved last year. There were some games we let slip away. But at the end of the day, we can’t be upset with 32

wins. We had a good group of players. Overall, it was a very successful season, but I still believe there are areas where our program can improve,” said Coach McCue.

During the fall sports season, the Bobcats played several games and participated in showcases, including a special matchup in September against Olney Central College at Busch Stadium in St. Louis.

“The fall season went great for us,” said McCue. “We have a very new team this year, so we’re much less experienced. But the season went well, and we learned a lot about ourselves. Some weaknesses

and areas for improvement were exposed early on, which was really beneficial. We adjusted our training accordingly.

“We performed well at the showcases, played strong against some good teams, and held our own in games. What I’ve learned about this year’s team is that they want to grow and are open to being coached. We’ve improved significantly, largely because we have a young, talented group of players who are all here for the same reasons. They’re coachable, and I think we have a great opportunity to grow with players like that,” he added.

Having seasoned veteran players returning to help lead the team is always an asset.

“We have a lot of players back this year, though not as many received significant playing time compared to last year’s veterans,” said Coach McCue. “Still, we’ve got a strong, vocal group of sophomores and returning players. They’ve done an excellent job setting the standard—being good teammates, training the right way, and leading by example.

“They’ll guide us on the field in many ways as well. We’re looking forward to seeing how that leadership continues to develop. This specific group of veterans is a bit more vocal compared to last year’s veterans, which brings a new dynamic to the team,” he added.

Coach McCue highlighted a few returning players to watch this season, including Cole Sims (SO, OF), Ty Becker (SO, 1B), Gael Salinas (RS-F, Utility), and Joaquin Gutierrez (SO, MIF). Notably, Sims has already signed his National Letter of Intent to play at Western Illinois University in Macomb next season.



L to R: Cole Sims, Trenton Creek, Ethan Payne, and Byler Reither

This year’s Bobcats Baseball team features 25 freshmen and a few transfer players.

“They’re very athletic,” said Coach McCue. “We have some talented freshmen and a handful of transfer sophomores. We brought in an outfielder and a few pitchers who will help shoulder the load. The leadership from our transfers has been excellent, bringing valuable experience to a younger team.

“As for the freshmen, I want to see them grow. I don’t want them to have that ‘deer in the headlights’ look. I want them to feel free to make mistakes, to appreciate both the successes and the adversity they’ll face. One of our themes this fall was to compete—no matter the score or the circumstances. We aim to compete on every play. If the last play didn’t go well, the focus should shift to competing on the next one.

“Our goal is to instill a foundation of competition and resilience in these young players, and I’m hopeful this will help them develop into consistent ballplayers over the long term,” McCue added.

Coach McCue highlighted several key transfers joining the team this season: Byler Reither (SO, RHP, Missouri Southern State University), Ethan Payne (SO, RHP, Allen Community College), Isaiah Thompson (SO, OF, Indiana State University), and Evan Hart (SO, LHP, University of Kentucky).

Reither has committed to playing baseball at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida, next season. Payne has committed to Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla, Missouri. Thompson transferred in from Indiana State University, bringing additional depth to the roster. Hart joins Frontier

following his time with the Kentucky Wildcats baseball team, where he was a member of their 2024 College World Series squad. In high school, Hart earned recognition as the 2022-2023 Kentucky Gatorade Player of the Year and was ranked as the #1 player in the state of Kentucky.

McCue also highlighted several promising freshmen, including Ian Olivier-Beaulieu (FR, RHP), Cam Napier (FR, MIF), Chance Pair (FR, C), and Sean McConachie (FR, C).

When asked about the team’s goals for this season, Coach McCue emphasized a few key areas.

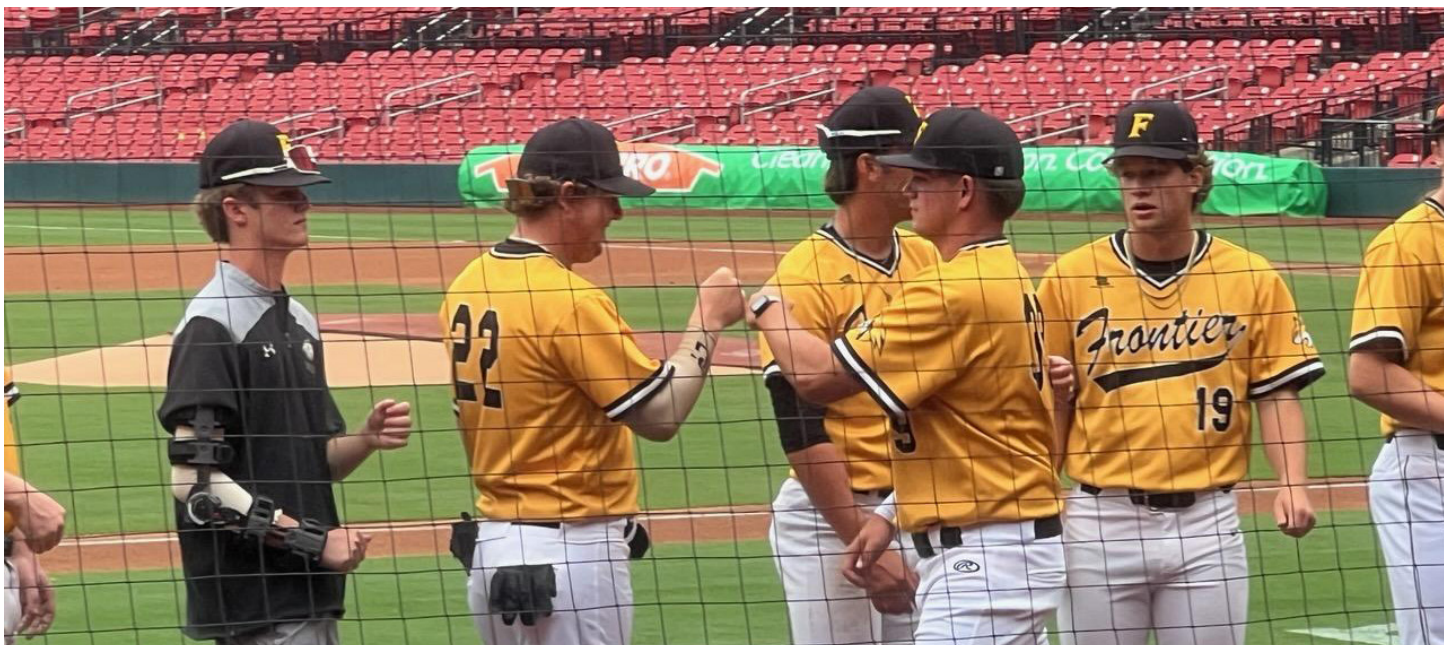
“Our mission and goal are to get our players ready for the next level,” said McCue. “We have a lot of young players who have entrusted their futures to us, and we take that responsibility very

personally. Our focus is on doing everything we can to help with their development.

Recruiting is the lifeblood of any sports program, and Coach McCue believes the recent success of the Bobcats has significantly bolstered their recruiting efforts.

“Recruiting has been very good,” said McCue. “We’ve had a lot of success for several reasons, and the program’s recent achievements have played a big role. A lot of credit goes to the players who put in the work.

“When we sit down with potential recruits, we make it a point to outline what they can expect. We talk about our values, our mission, and why we believe you won’t find many coaching staff that work harder than we do to help players succeed. We call it the ‘no surprises rule.’ We’re



Landon Harrellson (39) fist bumps Ty Becker (22) at a fall exhibition game at Busch Stadium in St. Louis. Photo credit: Dustin Fuller

upfront about who we are, what we believe in, and what their day-to-day life might look like as part of this program.

“We also emphasize the importance of being involved in the community. Recruiting has been a rewarding experience; I’ve enjoyed getting to know the players and their families. At the college level, you’re not just recruiting the player—you’re also building trust with the parents. One of the things I focus on is communicating confidence to parents that they can trust us. They’re entrusting us with their child for a couple of years, and we take that responsibility very seriously.”

When asked about the team’s goals for this season, Coach McCue emphasized a few key areas.

“On the field, I’d like to see us improve in a few areas. One specific goal is doing a better job of winning game twos of doubleheaders. Last year’s team struggled with finishing doubleheader days properly. I also think we can perform better on the road compared to last season. Ultimately, we want to secure the best seed possible in the Great Rivers Athletic Conference (GRAC) postseason tournament,” he added.

McCue shared his thoughts on the teams to watch in the GRAC.

“Since I’ve been here, Wabash Valley College and John A. Logan have been the teams to beat,” said McCue. “We saw both this fall, and they have a lot of athletic ability and talent. I also think Southwestern Illinois College and Lincoln Trail College will be stronger this year and will compete for the top spot. We believe we’ll be right up there with them.”

When asked what fans can expect when attending a game at FNB Field on campus or on the road, McCue summed it up succinctly.

“Fans can expect to see a lot of new faces, but we’re going to play hard, gritty Bobcat Baseball just like last year’s group did. I think we have the potential to be just as good, if not better, than last year’s team. That said, there may be more ups and downs this season. Growing pains can be tough, but they’re part of the process.

“This is a great group—fun to watch and fun to coach. I encourage everyone to come out and catch a game at least once this year,” McCue added.

The Bobcats kick off their season on Friday, January 31, at Wallace State Community College in Hanceville, Alabama. Their first home game at FNB Field is scheduled for Tuesday, February 4, when they host Oakland City University at 12:00 noon.

For the full Bobcats Baseball roster, schedule, and more, visit fccbobcats.com. Home games will also be live-streamed on the Bobcat Nation YouTube channel.



FCC Christmas Party 2024

A SEASON OF SERVICE AND CELEBRATION

Frontier Community College hosted its Christmas party on Tuesday, December 17, at Bob Boyles Hall. Attendees enjoyed a catered lunch from Big Boy Barbecue, along with dessert and refreshments. After lunch, everyone participated in a white elephant gift exchange, unwrapping a variety of fun and unique gifts.

Before the festivities, Debbie Wiedwilt, Program Assistant for Prairie State, was recognized for her 15 years of service. Wiedwilt works under Laurie Taylor, Associate Dean of Business and Industry. Reflecting on Debbie's contributions, Taylor said, "Debbie has been a key member of the MIT (formerly WED) team for over 15 years. She is always willing to go the extra mile for instructors and students and serves as an excellent liaison for IECC with Prairie State Generating Company."

Following winter break, a faculty/staff workshop was held on Thursday, January 2 at Bob Boyles Hall. Four employees were recognized for their years of service to Frontier and the IECC district. They are: Justn Young, Financial Aid Specialist – 5 years; Andy Hill, Bobcat Den Manager – 10 years; Jodi Peach, Phlebotomy & CMA Instructor – 10 years; Mary Johnston, Director of Business – 20 years.



L to R: Dr. Jay Edgren and Debbie Wiedwilt



From clockwise, starting top left: Mary Johnston, Jodi Peach, Justin Young, and Andy Hill.

FROM DEEP DISH TO SKYSCRAPERS: A TEACHING MOMENT IN CHICAGO

Linda Monge and her Teaching in Diverse Society class embarked on a two-day trip to Chicago to explore the city's tourist attractions and diverse cultures. The trip took place on Friday, December 6, through Saturday, December 7. The students who went on the trip were Zoe Wiggins, Ashton Bullard, Levi Vandergraph, Morgan Jasman, AJ Hollowell, Emmy Vinson, and Aubrey Churchill.

"The class is designed for future teachers, but I also have students who are not planning to become teachers. Wherever you work in today's world—especially if you leave Wayne County—you're likely to encounter a diverse population," Monge explained. "I told the class that if they wanted to go to Chicago,

they had to raise the money themselves. None of them had ever been to Chicago before, and they thought it was a great opportunity. They managed to fund the trip entirely through fundraising efforts."

To fund the trip, the group organized a taco bar, pork burger, and calendar fundraiser during the semester. They also received a donation from the Frontier Community College Foundation. Monge explained, "It shows young people how much it costs to visit a city. None of us would probably be able to afford two nights and all the activities we did on our own. By combining our fundraising efforts with the



donation, we were able to meet our \$2,200 goal. The students were willing to work hard to achieve that goal.”

Monge reported that the weather in Chicago during their visit was cold, very windy, and sunny, which she considered decent for early December. Last year, Monge and her class traveled to Chicago via Amtrak. This year, she opted to drive a van full of students, citing time constraints as the reason for the change.

The group left for Chicago on Friday morning. They arrived at Renaissance Chicago on Upper Wacker Drive around 10:30 a.m. The hotel is in a prime location, within walking distance of Millennium Park and Michigan Avenue. After checking in and storing their belongings, the group headed to Pizano’s Pizza, a nearby restaurant. Chicago is famous for its deep-dish pizza, and the group enjoyed an authentic Chicago-style deep-dish meal.

Their next stop was Daley Plaza on Washington Street, named after longtime mayor Richard J. Daley, who served from the 1950s through the 1970s. The Christkindlmarket was being held there, offering the group a chance to experience one of the most authentic traditional holiday markets outside Europe, inspired by German traditions. Afterward, they visited the Museum of Illusions, also located on Washington Street.

Later, the group explored Millennium Park, which runs parallel to Michigan Avenue. The park features several iconic attractions, including the Jay Pritzker Pavilion, Cloud Gate (commonly known as “The Bean”), and an ice-skating rink. A few students took advantage of the free ice-skating, as long as they brought their own skates. The group then visited the Macy’s store in Chicago, housed in the historic Marshall Field’s building on North State Street. This landmark building is renowned for its multiple atriums, Tiffany glass-domed ceiling, and two famous outdoor clocks.

For dinner on Friday evening, the group dined at Mia Francesca, an upscale Italian restaurant on North Clark Street. Monge arranged transportation using Uber and Lyft, marking the students' first experience with rideshare services. While there, they were joined by Monge's son and grandchildren, adding a personal touch to the evening.

After dinner, the group walked to the Briar Street Theatre on North Halsted Street to see a performance by the Blue Man Group. This long-running show has been the only production staged at the Briar Street Theatre since 1997, occupying the venue for more than two-thirds of its existence since it opened in 1985. With the announcement that Blue Man Group will conclude its run at the theatre in January 2025, the timing of the visit felt perfect for Monge and the students.

On Saturday morning, the group began their day with breakfast at Chick-fil-A, conveniently located across the street from the Renaissance Chicago. After breakfast, they visited the Merchandise Mart, the world's largest commercial building and design center, spanning five acres with 25 floors. While there, they attended the "One of a Kind" art and craft show, featuring unique gifts from artisans across the country.

Levi Vandergraph and Aubrey Churchill pose with a cool-looking giraffe.



AJ Hollowell and Emmy Vinson try to lure motorists in to buy a porkburger during their porkburger fundraiser at Fairfield Save-A-Lot.

After dropping off their purchases at the hotel, the group took taxis to Navy Pier, offering the students their first experience in a taxi. At the pier, they rode the Centennial Wheel, enjoying incredible views and taking photos to remember the moment.

Following their visit to Navy Pier, the group walked through downtown Chicago for some shopping. They initially considered eating lunch at The Cheesecake Factory but opted for Epic Burger due to long wait times at the former. After lunch, they visited Eataly, a massive 63,000-square-foot space with 23 eateries, a fine dining restaurant, and 21 retail departments, including a bakery, pastry counter, and coffee bar.

Before leaving Chicago, the group stopped at a souvenir shop to pick up mementos and then walked along Michigan Avenue. They made a final stop at Ghirardelli's to buy chocolates before departing the city at 5 p.m. On the way home, they stopped



at Portillo's in Champaign for dinner, finally arriving in Fairfield at 11 p.m.

Monge explained how the trip connected with what they had discussed in class: "They got to see city life and experience cultures they had never seen before. During their final exam, the students were asked to reflect on the semester, and all of them mentioned the trip. It really brought to life what we talked about in class. The population in the United States is very diverse. Locally, you see a little of it, but in Chicago, you see all kinds of nationalities. The traffic, the people, the skyscrapers—it's a culture they had never been exposed to before. I think it was a great culmination of our semester-long discussions about how times are changing, and that diversity is coming our way."

Monge expressed her admiration for this group of students, describing them as a joy to teach and commending their sense of unity. "Every student has learned something about

seeing the world through another set of eyes. Everyone's perception is different. We focus on the idea that the way I see things and the way you see things may not be the same, yet we can still work together. This class was awesome to work with. They all contributed, participated, and engaged in meaningful discussions. It was truly a great semester."

* Linda Monge submitted the Chicago trip photos. Thank you, Linda!



Members of the group in a topsy-turvy room at the Museum of Illusions.