

# KINGSMEN

## BASEBALL ACADEMY

### Q & A WITH KINGSMEN BASEBALL FOUNDER AND HEAD COACH JOE HUDAK

Joe Hudak is a veteran of 31 years of college baseball coaching. He was Assistant Coach at Kent State University(1979), Head Coach at Geneva College(1981-87, 1989), Pitching Coach at Mississippi State University(1988, 1990-91), and Head Coach at Winthrop University(1992-2010). He founded Kingsmen Baseball in 2015 and has been Head Coach of their summer college team for the past 10 years. His career record as a college Head Coach is 868-601, while his 10-year record with the Kingsmen is 243-78. He is a member of the Lawrence County, Geneva College, and Winthrop University Halls of Fame, and was the Division 1 Big South Conference Coach of the Decade(1990-1999).

### PART ONE

**Q: Maybe the first obvious question is why are you doing this? Why are you starting the Kingsmen Baseball Academy?**

**A:** Well, number one, I love teaching the game of baseball. I'm a baseball lifer. Coaching baseball is the only thing I've ever really wanted to do. I knew in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade that I wanted to coach baseball. I loved playing the game and I love teaching the game. I'm so blessed and thankful that the Lord has allowed me to coach my whole life. Number two, I have a passion to help prepare young men to succeed on the baseball field and also in the game of life.

**Q: Why the academy route?**

**A:** Elite baseball academies have been popping up in the Southeast over the past over the past several years. If you're a serious and talented baseball player, I believe it's the best way to prepare to succeed in college baseball and, hopefully, beyond. It's just like anything else. The more time you spend practicing and playing, the more prepared you are to be successful.

**Q: You've used the word prepare 3 times already in just two questions. That seems like an important word for you and your Academy, right?**

**A:** Absolutely! Preparation is **THE** key word for the Kingsmen Baseball Academy. I believe there are 3 key factors that will determine how successful you'll be in anything you attempt, not just

baseball. They are Preparation, Effort, and Execution. We know that lack of Execution will always be a part of baseball. Players will make errors, pitchers will mislocate pitches, and hitters will strike out. Those things will happen, but I tell my players that there is absolutely no excuse for lack of Preparation or lack of Effort.

**Q: If you feel Preparation is the key, how will the Kingsmen Baseball Academy prepare players to succeed on the baseball field?**

**A:** In my opinion, the quality of your preparation to succeed in baseball depends on two things. It depends on the quality of your instruction and the quality of your competition. At our Academy, players will receive instruction from highly skilled college and professional coaches and players. These are people who have played and coached baseball at the highest levels. We will have 3-4 hours of highly targeted practice each day. We will have a Nationally Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist who specializes in baseball. As for the quality of our competition, we will play a 40-50 game spring schedule. These will be games against excellent competition day in and day out. The normal high school schedule is 20-25 games, many of which are against poor competition. You get better playing against better competition. We will play in 3 top-notch academy tournaments, one in Alabama and 2 in Florida. We will play other elite baseball academies across the Southeast. We will also play against junior college and other college baseball teams. We will end the spring with an 8-10 day mission trip to the Dominican Republic, where we'll play 4-5 games against Dominican teams and do some mission work. I've taken 17 teams to the DR. It's a life-changing experience!

**Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add about Preparation, at least the baseball part of it?**

**A:** One additional thing that I think is very important in baseball preparation is the weather. I was born and raised in Western Pennsylvania. I coached high school ball there for 6 years and college ball for 9 years. If you talk to any college coach or professional scout, they will tell you that warm-weather players are usually further along and better prepared than cold-weather players. It's certainly not that they are more talented, because they're not. They're just better prepared because they can play and practice longer and do it in better weather. When I coached at Geneva College in Western Pennsylvania, we couldn't get outside and on a field until the middle of March. When I coached at Winthrop University here in Rock Hill, we were able to get outside regularly in January. And it's not just the ability to get outside and on the field, it's also prevention of injuries, especially for pitchers. Arm injuries and pulled muscles happen a lot more in cold weather. It's just a fact that, for baseball, you have greater probability of being better prepared in warmer weather.

## **PART TWO**

**Q: In Part One of this Q&A, we talked almost exclusively about the first of Kingsmen Baseball Academy's 4 Core Principles, which is Elite Baseball Development. I want to move on to your**

**second Core Principle which is Spiritual/Character Development. When you say the Academy is faith-based, what exactly do you mean?**

**A:** Well, I guess the simple answer is that our Academy is based on the Christian faith. The word Christian means Christ-like. Our goal is to have our players grow in their relationship with Christ. While we would never try to force any beliefs on our players, we do want to help our players understand what it really means to be a Christian. We want them to know that it's not just a list of rules and regulations, or dos and don'ts. It's having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and trying to follow Him and being Christ-like (Christian)..

**Q: So, do you require your players to be Christians in order to attend your Academy?**

**A:** No, we do not. Our players don't have to be Christians or sign a statement of faith, or anything like that. They simply need to know who we are and what we stand for. They need to know that we will have mandatory team Bible studies, that we will go to church together occasionally, and that we will go on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic. We have also sponsored a summer college team for the past 8 years. Our players all come from a wide variety of spiritual backgrounds. If you looked at a typical team, some of the players were raised in the church and know a lot about Jesus, others have rarely been in church and know very little about Christ, and the rest of them are somewhere in between. I would anticipate the Academy team to be similar. Again, our goal is to help them understand what it really means to be a Christian so they can decide for themselves if they want to follow Christ. If players decide they aren't interested in being a Christian, we still feel that we are helping them develop into men of character and integrity, men who will be better husbands and fathers and leaders.

**Q: What is your personal story of faith in Christ?**

**A:** Well, I gave my life to Christ when I was 16 years old. It was the best decision that I ever made. It doesn't mean that I've been perfect. Far from it! My players know that better than anyone else. They see me at my worst. I'm a pretty intense guy (as I'm sure they would tell you)! I hate to lose. My desire to live for Christ and my competitiveness battle just about every day. And if I'm honest, I lose that battle more than I'd like to admit. I've always identified with Peter in the Bible. He had a heart for Christ but made a lot of mistakes. That's a pretty good description of me. Being a Christian also doesn't mean that life will always be an easy bed of roses. It won't be. We all go through struggles and storms and adversity. Christ has promised to be with us through the tough times. I know He has definitely helped me as I've gone through my storms.

**Q: In your answer to the very first question, you said you had a passion to help young men succeed in the game of life. What did you mean by that?**

**A:** I believe athletics is a microcosm of life. In sports, you have success, and you have failure. You have amazing highs, and you go through painful lows. You get knocked down, and you have to learn to get back up. I truly believe that following Christ helps during those tough times. One of my favorite parables that Christ taught is the wise and foolish builders. The foolish man built his house on the sand, which means he built it based on what the world tells us is important: success, wealth, power, popularity, etc. The wise man built his house on the rock, which means he built it on what God tells us is important: faith, truth, love, honesty, etc. The Bible tells us the rains fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded both of those houses. The one built on the sand collapsed, but the one built on the rock stood. We know Jesus wasn't talking about physical houses, but He was talking about us and our lives. We want to help our guys build their house (their life) on the rock so that they will stand when the storms come.

**Q: Do you have anything else to add about your faith-based pillar?**

**A:** I think the only thing would be to reiterate that we will never try to force any beliefs on our players. We think it's important for them to learn what it really means to be a Christian and how it can help them as they live their lives. Then they can decide for themselves if they want to follow Christ. That's what I meant when I said we wanted to help prepare them to succeed in the game of life.

### **PART THREE**

**Q: Now that we have covered the baseball and the faith parts of your Academy, let's finish with some general questions. If you will practice 3-4 a day, how will the players' academics work?**

**A:** The players will do their academic work online. This the same as the other elite baseball academies. The player's family will choose whichever online platform that want to use. Every state has a free online school for residents of that state. There are also some national online programs that are available.

**Q: Will the Academy provide any academic support for the players?**

**A:** Yes, we will have an Academic Coordinator for academic support. This coordinator will have the login information for each player and will monitor the players' academic progress, making sure they are going to class and doing well in their grades. The coordinator will also supervise the daily study hall that all players will be required to attend. We will also provide a list of tutors for players who need help with a class, and will arrange for SAT/ACT prep.

**Q: You are starting your Academy in the middle of the school year. Will players have a problem transferring from their traditional high school to the online school of choice?**

**A:** No. We have checked with online schools from several states. They all indicate that they admit hundreds of students at mid-year. There should be no problem.

**Q: Will getting an online degree make it difficult to be admitted to a high academic university?**

**A:** No. I have personally spoken to three of my coaching friends who I have known for years, Tom Walter from Wake Forest, Chris Pollard from Duke, and Scott Forbes from North Carolina. All three said there should be no problem as long as the player takes the right classes and does well. They all have players from other similar baseball academies on their teams. All state-sponsored online schools are 100% NCAA accredited.

**Q: Let's move onto to housing. Do you provide housing for players who come from outside the local area?**

**A:** Yes. There is a very nice apartment complex just beyond the centerfield wall of CaroMont Health Park, our home field. These players will stay at this complex. One of our coaches will live at the complex as well and we will have Life360 on our players living in the apartments. The players will be very well supervised.

**Q: Are there any other services you provide?**

**A:** Yes. Our Hitting Coach, Weston Lawing, is a Nationally Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist. He owns 704 Sports Academy that is just a few minutes from the stadium. It's an indoor hitting and strength facility. Coach Lawing will setup and implement a personalized program for each player. We will also provide a Nutritionist to advise the players about proper nutrition.

**Q: What is the cost of attending the Academy?**

**A:** Our tuition is \$8500 per semester which covers all uniform, equipment, transportation, lodging, and meals when we are on the road, and other baseball expenses. It also covers the cost of the mission trip to the Dominican Republic. The only thing it does not cover is daily meals. Players are responsible for their daily meals. Housing for out of area players is \$2500 per semester for double occupancy or \$5000 per semester for a single room.

**Q: As we wrap up this Q&A, is there anything else you'd like prospective players to know about the Kingsmen Baseball Academy?**

**A:** I believe our coaching staff, facilities, schedule, and academic support are second to none. I guess I'd like to make sure that players and parents know that we will genuinely care for our players. I want parents to know that I will watch out for their son like he was my own son.