



# Xavier Connexion

By John Baldrige

When most people hear about Xavier University, their first question is often, "Where is that?" Xavier University is located in Cincinnati, Ohio. It is a Catholic university with a student body of 6,798 students. Known for a proud tradition of being a small school with a big city feel, Xavier has assembled some strong baseball teams in recent years under the leadership of head coach Billy O'Conner. Xavier, which plays Division I in the Big East Conference, tied their school record with 39 wins in 2023 and put together another winning season in 2024 under O'Conner, going 30-27. On that Xavier team in 2024, two freshmen, catcher Tyler Stack, right-handed pitcher Ryan Hussey, and infielder Donovan Canterbury found a home together in Fond du Lac.

Fond du Lac, a small community much like Xavier with over 44,000 people, is known for its love of the Dock Spiders. The Dock Spiders ended up with the three Xavier Musketeers playing and living together this summer in Fond du Lac. For Stack and Canterbury, it was planned through a connection the Dock Spiders have with Xavier assistant coach Joey Bellini. The Dock Spiders were to receive the two best-fit players from Xavier to come to Fond du Lac and play this summer.

"Xavier assigns and makes the selection pretty early on about where we're going to play during the summer," said Canterbury when asked about the selection process of playing for the Dock Spiders. He recalled being assigned to the Dock Spiders in September 2023.

Ryan Hussey ended up in Fond du Lac a little differently from Stack and Canterbury. Hussey initially signed a temporary contract with the Rockford Rivets in the Northwoods League to start the year. But when that contract came to an end, the Dock Spiders selected his contract and assigned him to a full-season contract in Fond du Lac.



The Dock Spiders connection doesn't end at the clubhouse door, it extends into the front office as well. Two members of the Dock Spiders staff, John Baldrige and Tucker White, are both students at Xavier. John, the team's broadcaster, is a rising senior at Xavier, and Tucker, part of the stadium operations unit, graduated from Xavier in the spring.

For all five of these Musketeers, fate and coincidence played a role in landing in Fond du Lac this summer. For Tyler Stack, playing for the Dock Spiders hits home a little more. Stack's father, Rob, grew up in the Fond du Lac area. Stack and Baldrige are also experiencing their second summer collegiate season together, as both were members of the Cincinnati Steam in the Great Lakes League in 2023 – Stack at catcher and Baldrige in the broadcast booth.

"It's really cool to play ball where my father grew up and to wear this jersey," said Stack.

This is the second straight year that the Dock Spiders have had at least two players from Xavier University. Outfielder Teddy Deters and left-handed pitcher Jack Niedringhaus were part of the club in 2023.

The connection shows how paths can cross in unexpected ways. Through baseball, five students from a small school in Cincinnati ended up in one town, united by one organization with a shared goal to promote themselves and improve over the summer.