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Monkey Do

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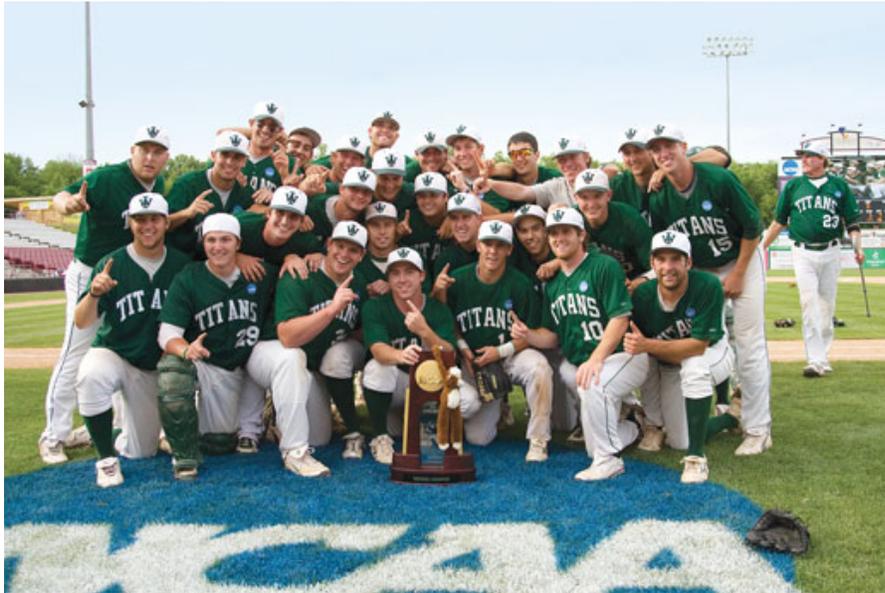
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Monkey Do

With a stuffed chimp for a mascot, the Titan baseball team went from underdogs to national champions.



Story by Stew Salowitz '76

Only four days after the Illinois Wesleyan women's track team won the NCAA Division III national outdoor championship ([see related story](#)), the Titan baseball team became the school's fifth national champion with a 17-5 win over SUNY Cortland on June 1 in Grand Chute, Wis.

The Titan baseball team defeated SUNY Cortland to capture the 2010 Division III national trophy. Next to the trophy is a stuffed monkey. After it was adopted as a mascot late in the season, the underdog team began its phenomenal winning streak. (Photo by Jeff Findley)

“It was really a Cinderella story for us to get there and

accomplish what we have,” said Titan Coach Dennis Martel, whose team won the first national championship in Division III baseball for a College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin (CCIW) team. “The guys just did a great job. I couldn't be more proud of what we did. It's been an unbelievable ride and I thank them for letting me be part of it.”

Getting to the championship wasn't easy. The Titans staved off elimination three times as the No. 4 seed in the CCIW tournament but prevailed to win, then swept the Central Regional field, coming in as the tournament's No. 6 seeded team.

Illinois Wesleyan finished with a 31-21 record and the 21 setbacks are the most by a Division III champion in the 35-year history of the national tourney.

Third baseman Jeff Grodecki '11 was named the national tournament's Most Outstanding Player as he hit two home runs in the championship game and had 13 hits in 20 at bats in the World Series. Grodecki was joined on the all-tournament team by first baseman Casey McIntosh '10, catcher Mark McDermott '12 and pitcher Jason Pankau '11.

Pankau was also named to the third team of the American Baseball Coaches Association All-American squads and was the CCIW Pitcher of the Year. Two pitching victories in the World Series gave Pankau 11 for the season, tying the IWU single-season record held by Nathan Knuffman '98.

A stuffed monkey seen in many photos adorning the championship trophies was purchased by Brett Moore '10 late in the season at a new Dollar Tree store across from the campus. The monkey also enjoyed a prominent place in the IWU dugout and symbolized how loose and carefree the team played down the stretch.



IWU's student section was the largest and most vocal of the fans at the Division III series. (Photo by Jeff Findley)

“This whole season, we’ve said you could literally make a movie with all the characters on this team,” said McDermott. “It was a lot of fun. And ever since we got that monkey as a joke when we were playing North Central, we started hitting the heck out of the ball and just kept winning.”

The Titan baseball team is the school’s fifth national NCAA Division III team champion, joining the women’s outdoor track teams of 2010 and 2008, the women’s indoor track team of 2008 and the men’s basketball team of 1997.