

Season Recap: Commodores led league offensively, played for each other

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Photo by Liz Baker

The Falmouth Commodores final game of the regular season was cut short – called in the bottom of the seventh when the blue skies turned grey and Lowell Park in Cotuit was drenched by a passing rain cloud. As they say, when it rains, it pours. Of all the clichés, there has never been one more fitting for the 2013 Falmouth Commodores.

All season long, the Falmouth storm blew through each of the 10 Cape Cod Baseball League ballparks. It never came quietly, as the thundering offense tallied league-leading totals and the lightening-quick defense stymied batters left and right with skillful precision.

But just as the Commodores regular season ended with a loss to the Cotuit Kettleers, so did their postseason run.

Falmouth took the first game of their postseason series against Cotuit 6-5. The Kettleers were the first on the board, notching two runs in the second inning, but a defensive error by Cotuit allowed the Commodores to put a run across the plate in the fourth and pull the deficit to just one run.

From there the runs trickled in on both sides. For any Commodores fan, this was unusual to see. All season long, great offensive booms with one or two high-scoring innings characterized Falmouth's victories. Rarely did this squad see a game in which they were so evenly matched.

In fact, heading into the postseason matchup against Cotuit, Falmouth was even with their rival in almost every way. The Commodores and the Kettleers split their season series 3-3 with each team going 2-1 at home. While the Commodores lead the CCBL with a .285 batting average, the Kettleers outscored the Commodores 35-32 in the regular season.

Ultimately, the Commodores kept the Kettleers at bay and took the series lead 1-0.

The next night the game was scoreless after three innings. With runners on first and second in the top of the fourth, a three-run shot by Kevin Cron (Texas Christian University) put the Commodores on the board 3-0. The Kettleers fought back in the sixth as Cotuit slugger Rhett Wiseman would not go quietly, leading off the inning with his fifth home run of the season to bring Cotuit within two.

By the bottom of the ninth, the two teams found themselves tied 4-4, and just as they had all season long, the Commodores failed to record an extra innings win. Once again the Falmouth-Cotuit matchup was even.

With everything on the line, the Commodores returned to Arnie Allen Diamond at Guv Fuller Field for a win-or-go-home game. With everything on the line, the Commodores did as only they could. CCBL home run leader Casey Gillaspie (Wichita State University) put his eighth homer over the fence with a two run blast early on in the first, giving Falmouth an quick 2-0 lead.

But those two runs would be the only ones the team would see, as Cotuit got on the board in the second and didn't look back. Cotuit's pitching staff held the Commodore's bats, allowing only eight hits to the typically overpowering offense. In just over two and a half hours, the two month long season came to an end for the promising squad.

With undoubtedly the most decorated offense in the league, Falmouth ended the regular season with a 26-18 record to tie the Hyannis Harbor Hawks as co-division champions in the West. The Commodores were the only team to avoid a tied decision all season long.

Falmouth ended the regular season with five Commodores in the top-10 overall batting averages in the league. Shortstop and solid No. 2 hitter Kevin Newman (University of Arizona) became the first ever freshman to take home the Truman Munson batting title, leading the league with a .375 average. Cron trailed him in second with an average of .350. Also in the top-10 were Rhys Hoskins (Sacramento State University) in sixth with .326, Gillaspie in ninth with .321, and Dylan Davis (Oregon State University) in the 10-spot with a .317 average.

But their league leads didn't stop there. The Commodores also secured the top-three spots in the CCBL RBI overall totals with Hoskins pulling 37 RBI across the plate to take the first spot.

Davis put up a fight for the top spot with eight RBIs in the 18-3 victory against the Bourne Braves on August 2, but fell just short with 34 RBI in the regular season. Just behind was Gillaspie with 32 RBI.

Additionally, Falmouth led the league with most starters selected for the All Star game, with six players in the Western Division lineup. Commodores starting pitcher Brandon Magallones (Northwestern University) was also selected, putting the number of **Falmouth All Stars at seven**. The Commodores offense quickly became the talk of the CCBL. Davis exploded onto the Cape League scene with four home runs – one of which was a grand slam – in his first four games. Gillaspie quickly took hold of the home run lead and remained steadfast all season long and Cron battled at the plate to produce big hits in crucial moments.

While the middle-of-the-order sluggers dominated headlines all season, it wasn't without a solid performance from the top and bottom of the order that enabled the Commodores to have so much all-around success.

Newman was the only permanent fixture in Falmouth's starting line up to finish the season without a home run. Nonetheless, he notched 60 hits in the regular season. Of those 60 hits, only three were for extra bases, giving him the league lead in singles as well. Newman's consistency saw its height when he went five-for-six with six RBI in the July 22 14-3 victory over the Brewster Whitecaps.

Another solid staple in the Commodores line up was Falmouth's starting catcher from Texas A&M University, Troy Stein. Offensively, Stein proved time and time again his maturity at the plate. The rising senior consistently

worked the count full and proved his ability to produce in high-pressure situations. One such instance was in the second game of a double header against the Wareham Gateman. With the score tied 4-4 in the last inning of play and with two outs, Stein fought back from an 0-2 count to hammer a triple and put three runs across the board for the Commodores to tally a 7-4 victory over the Gatemen and sweep the series.

While the offense shined, the Falmouth pitching staff struggled to reach their potential all season long. A lack consistency proved to be the Achilles heel of the Commodores from the start.

Nonetheless, John Means of West Virginia University lead the team with a 1.99 ERA and 35 strikeouts in regular season play. He ended the season with a 3-3 record, with his most notable outing against the Harwich Mariners on July 31. In the 13-1 victory, Means pitched four hitless innings, allowing only one hit in his six-inning outing.

Trey Teakell (Texas Christian University) was another standout starter for the Commodores. He finished out the regular season with a 5-1 record, the best on the team. Teakell worked quickly on the mound, tallying 21 strikeouts in 47.1 innings pitched.

While neither Means nor Teakell were named to the All-Star team, both were placed on the CCBL All-League Team.

From the bullpen, Hunter Brothers (Lipscomb University) established himself as a reliable reliever for the Commodores, notching three saves in the regular and post-seasons combined. One of his more notable saves was in the 6-5 win over Cotuit in the first game of the postseason where he battled back with runners on first and second to keep the Kettleers from tying the game in the ninth.

Youngstown State University's Nic Manuppelli, who had the second lowest ERA of any Commodore reliever with more than 10 appearances on the season, also aided Falmouth's bullpen. Manuppelli, who had a 2.75 ERA, had 16 strikeouts in 16.1 innings pitched.

Even though the pitching staff struggled in the regular season, their postseason performance was exceptional. Regardless of the overall outcome, the Commodores bullpen showed a consistency unlike anything they had seen all season. Brent Stong (Bradley University) showed his ability to fan batters with a quick one, two, three inning against Cotuit in the first game of the series, while Kevin Mooney's (University of Maryland) nasty curve stymied batters in the second game of the season, notching four Ks in 2.1 innings pitched.

In the end, the Commodores summer ended abruptly, their offensive storm stifled by the Kettleers. And although Falmouth now ends its 33rd consecutive season without a championship, it was not without an impressive effort. For the Commodores, this year was one for the record books, leading the league in team totals with 219 RBIs, 254 runs, 32 home runs and 437 hits.

For coach Jeff Trundy, one more year without a ring means nothing in this championship drought with a team like the 2013 squad.

"They're certainly one of the most special groups I've had the privilege of being around," Trundy said after Falmouth fell in the first round of the playoffs. "I thought they were kids that not only appreciated the opportunity but they made the most of it. And they made the most of it in regards to their character. . . they really invest in each other. . . they play for each other."