



# 2024 SEASON RECAP



By Rekha Leonard

The Bethesda Big Train captured its eleventh Ripken League championship in 2024 with the most dominant playoff performance in Ripken League history, beating its opponents by a record net margin of 44 runs. The Big Train was virtually unbeatable down the stretch, but there were times earlier in the season where such success seemed almost impossible.

At multiple points throughout the season, the Big Train's record dipped below .500 as the team struggled to maintain consistency on both sides of the ball. After a loss to the Southern Maryland Senators on July 1 dropped the Big Train's record to 12-13, it went 9-2 to finish out the regular season and then won five straight playoff games. The belief that manager Sal Colangelo and his coaching staff had been preaching to the team all year finally manifested, and the Big Train got hot at the right time en route to earning its second straight championship.

## Regular Season

The Big Train started the regular season with a dominant 12-3 victory over the Gaithersburg Giants. **Matthew Westley (Virginia Tech)** hit the Big Train's first home run of the season, and **Cole Constable (Maryland)** singled twice and drove in two. On the mound, **Evan Smith (Maryland)** only allowed one run in four innings and Big Train relief pitcher of the year **Max Martzolf (Florida Atlantic)** set the tone for his impressive season with four strikeouts in two scoreless innings.

Following up its hot start with two more wins, the Big Train seemed to be in a good spot, but then three straight losses brought it back down to earth. Bethesda struggled with inconsistency, and its roster was constantly in flux as players came in after finishing their college seasons and others left for various reasons. The tide started to turn on June 9 as the Big Train beat the South County Braves, 10-6. Shortstop **Carter Newman (Virginia Tech)** went two for three.

Big Train MVP and 2024 Cal Ripken Sr. League Most Outstanding Hitter **Andrew Williamson (Central Florida)** made his debut on June 10, and the impact of his addition soon became evident. On June 13, Williamson went two for four and scored two runs as the Big Train beat the Thunderbolts, 8-5. **Parker Thomas (East Carolina)** took the win with two and two thirds innings of shutout hurling. In a close loss to the Alexandria Aces on June 15, Williamson hit three doubles with four RBIs, showing an inkling of what was to come for him.

The next day, the Big Train's pitching staff put together one of its best games of the season with a 6-0 win over the Senators. **Jake Villar (Santa Barbara CC)** started and went five innings, accumulating seven strikeouts, and four relievers closed out the game to complete the shutout. **Landon Franklin's (Kentucky)** solo home run in the second inning accentuated Bethesda's well-rounded performance. The next day, the Big Train captured a nice win over the D.C. Grays, 6-2. **Aaron Cenicerros (Cal State Fullerton)** launched the game with a fine start, pitching 3.2 scoreless innings. **Aden Ritenour (Shepherd)** mopped up with three innings of no-hit ball to earn the save.

Amidst a subsequent stretch of .500 play from the Big Train, a few standout performances provided hope and a spark. **Kenan Bowman (East Carolina)** hit two home runs in a one-run loss to the Cropdusters on June 20. The Big Train flipped the script a few days later with a one-run, extra-inning win over the Silver Spring-Takoma Thunderbolts on June 22. **Jordan Crosland (Maryland)** went four-for-five with four RBIs in the comeback win.

Catcher **Luke Vaughn (Alabama)** was a late addition to the team, but like Williamson, he quickly made an impact. In his second game, he had three hits, two runs, and an RBI, helping the Big Train crush the D.C. Grays, 13-0. **Will Clements (Tulane)**, **Ariston Veasey (Alabama)**, and **Aidan Kelley (Jacksonville)** dominated on the mound, throwing a combined 14 strikeouts to earn the Big Train's second shutout of the season.

The Big Train's most outstanding hitter winner **Emilio Gonzalez (Florida Atlantic)** started to find his groove toward the end of June, flexing his power with two doubles and two RBIs in a 7-2 win over the Giants on June 29. Gonzalez was heating up, and so was the rest of the team.

On July 2, the Big Train exploded with a 15-8 win over the Metro SOCO Braves. **Jaden Bastian (Jacksonville)** had four hits and three RBIs, and Williamson rocketed two homers.



Max Martzolf

Photo by Mark Thalman



*On July 1, the Big Train fell to 12-13, and winning the Ripken League seemed impossible. But by late July, an eleventh Ripken League crown seemed inevitable.*

#### 2024 Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate Baseball League

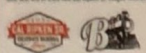
### Most Outstanding Hitter

#### ANDREW WILLIAMSON

OF | Central Florida

.462 AVERAGE 9 HOME RUNS  
.546 ON BASE 16 DOUBLES  
.906 SLUGGING 33 RBI  
1.452 OPS 38 RBIS

RBI, SL, and OPS are new Cal Ripken Sr. League records



That was the clear turning point in the season, as from that game on, the Big Train finished the regular season 9-2.

The Big Train followed up its win over the Braves with a 7-1 thrashing of the Grays. The stars shone bright, as Gonzalez had four hits and Williamson had three. Smith made another quality start, while Ritenour and **Kevin Scully (James Madison)** relieved him, the three combining for 13 strikeouts on the day.

One of the most dramatic games of the season was an extra-inning matchup with the league-leading Aces on July 7. **Josh Skowronski (Kentucky)** pinch hit in the sixth inning and hit a two-run bomb to keep the Big Train in the game. **Evan Hart (Kentucky)** kept the Aces at bay with four solid innings of relief. Extra innings became a pitcher's duel, and Big Train pitcher of the year **Jonathan Stevens (Alabama)** won. With the bases loaded in the 11th inning, he froze three straight batters with swinging strikeouts to leave the runners stranded. **Davin Whitaker (East Carolina)** subsequently used his speed to secure the Big Train victory, scoring the winning run on a sacrifice fly from Skowronski.

**Justin Nadeau (Jacksonville)** joined the Big Train right around when the team was heating up, and he entered just as hot. He had three hits in his first game on July 6 and four on July 11, including three doubles. He was astonishingly consistent in his short time with the Big Train, ending the regular season with .344 average, second only to Williamson.

All-star **Chris Diaz (Tulane)** was also one of the Big Train's most consistent producers, posting the third highest batting average with a .338. Batting leadoff, he had three hits, including a triple, against the Giants on July 8.

The Big Train's pitching staff had some up and down moments throughout the season, but it started to solidify in July. The addition of **Trevor Orth (Roanoke)** was one major reason why. Orth pitched in the Ripken League in 2023, but he decided to take the 2024 season off and work as the Big Train's concessions manager. He told Colangelo that he was always ready to go if called upon, and on July 13, he made his Big Train debut. He pitched 3.1 innings in the remainder of the regular season and had a 0.00 ERA with no hits allowed.

The Big Train finished the regular season with a bang, run-ruling the Grays, 16-4, on July 17. Williamson got on base in all six of his at bats with three hits and three walks. His impressive performance against the Grays capped off a stellar regular season, as he officially set new Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate Baseball League records with a .462 batting average and .906 slugging percentage. **Jack Robinson (Roanoke)** earned the win by hurling two innings of no-hit ball.

While the Big Train finished the season on a hot streak, the Giants maintained their hold on the North division. The Big Train clinched the third seed for the playoffs behind the second-seeded Giants and the Aces, winners of the South division and the top seed. But the Big Train had plenty of momentum on its side entering the playoffs, and its dominance was only just beginning.

### Play-in Game

As the third seed, the Big Train played a single elimination game versus the sixth-seeded Braves on July 20. Starting pitcher **Joey Wimpelberg (Central Florida)** was outstanding, only allowing one run in six innings, his longest outing of the season. At the plate, the Big Train exploded. Nadeau had three hits, including a two-

### 2024 Final Regular Season CRSCL Standings

	W-L	%	GB
<b>NORTH DIVISION</b>			
Gaithersburg Giants	23-13	.639	-
Bethesda Big Train	21-15	.583	2
Cropdusters Baseball	17-19	.472	6
SS-Takoma Thunderbolts	12-24	.333	11
<b>SOUTH DIVISION</b>			
Alexandria Aces	25-11	.694	-
Southern Maryland Senators	16-20	.444	9
Metro South County Braves	16-20	.444	9
DC Grays	14-22	.389	11

### 2024 Montgomery Cup Standings

	W	L	%
Gaithersburg Giants	11-7	.611	-
Bethesda Big Train	10-8	.556	1
Cropdusters Baseball	10-8	.556	1
SS-Takoma Thunderbolts	5-13	.278	6

### Sal Colangelo's 2024 Big Train Manager's Awards

**Most Valuable Player**  
Andrew Williamson (Central Florida)

**Most Outstanding Hitter**  
Emilio Gonzalez (Florida Atlantic)

**Pitcher of the Year**  
Jonathan Stevens (Alabama)

**Relief Pitcher of the Year**  
Max Martzolf (Florida Atlantic)



**CRSCL Most Outstanding Hitter**  
Andrew Williamson (Central Florida)

**CRSCL League Championship Series**  
**Most Outstanding Player**  
Andrew Williamson (Central Florida)

**CRSCL All Star Game**  
**Most Outstanding Player**  
Kenan Bowman (East Carolina)

**CRSCL First Team All League**  
Max Martzolf (Florida Atlantic)  
Jonathan Stevens (Alabama)  
Andrew Williamson (Central Florida)





# 2024 SEASON RECAP



run homer, and Vaughn reached base in all five of his at bats. Finally, Williamson concluded the game in the eighth inning with a three-run, walk-off homer to secure the 16-4, run-rule win.

## League Semifinals

After crushing the Braves, the Big Train prepared to face a familiar rival: the Giants. The Giants may have bested the Big Train in the regular season, winning four of six matchups and claiming the division, but the playoffs were an entirely different story.

In the first game of the series, the Big Train got right to work. Smith pitched a gem, while Orth and Stevens were outstanding in relief. On offense, Williamson, Whitaker, and Franklin each had two hits. Crosland had the highlight of the day with a two-run bomb in the fourth inning, as the Big Train won, 11-2.

The Big Train didn't let up in the second game, scoring early and often. Williamson and Bastian flexed their power with first-inning doubles, and Whitaker notched an RBI single on the first pitch he saw to give the Big Train a first inning lead that it never relinquished. All nine starters made it on base at least once, and seven of the nine recorded an RBI. **Jack Guerrero (UNC Wilmington)** entered late in the game and batted 1.000. On the mound, **Sam Mitchell (Alabama)**, Martzolf, and **Brandon Cassedy (George Mason)** combined for 12 strikeouts, as the Big Train beat the Giants, 10-3, to move on to the championship series.



Andrew Williamson Photo by Mark Thalman

## League Championship Series

While the Big Train made easy work of the Giants in the semifinals, the Southern Maryland Senators pulled off an upset, winning their semifinal series over the Aces to play for their first league championship in team history.

The Senators carried some momentum into their first game against the Big Train, opening it by scoring the first two runs. **Jake Titus (Kentucky)** and Orth, however, kept the Big Train in the game through seven innings, paving the way for the offense to take over. The Big Train subsequently broke the game open with a five-run seventh inning, highlighted by doubles from Gonzalez and Westley. Overall, Gonzalez had four RBIs, Westley had three hits, and Williamson was dominant once again with four hits. Stevens closed out the Big Train's 9-2 win, putting the team one win away from the championship.

After starting slow in the first game, the Big Train completely changed the narrative the next night. On the brink of the championship, Bethesda left no doubt, dominating the game from start to finish.

Nadeau led off the game with a double, and Williamson promptly knocked in the first run with an RBI single. Whitaker and Bowman kept the train rolling, each rocketing a two RBI triple, the first of three hits in the game for each of them. The Big Train then tacked on five runs in the fifth and sixth innings, highlighted by doubles from Nadeau, Whitaker, and Bowman.

Wimpelberg threw another solid start, only allowing two hits through three scoreless frames. Martzolf kept the Big Train in the lead with six strikeouts in four innings of relief. Six outs away from claiming the championship, the Big Train turned to Cassedy. He delivered, setting down the final three batters with swinging strikeouts to win the game, 12-3. At the final swing and miss, the Big Train dugout cleared, mobbing Cassedy at the mound in celebration.

The difficult games at the beginning of the season became a distant memory once the final strike was thrown and the trophy was presented. For the second year in a row and the 11th in team history, the Big Train ended the season atop the Ripken League once more.

