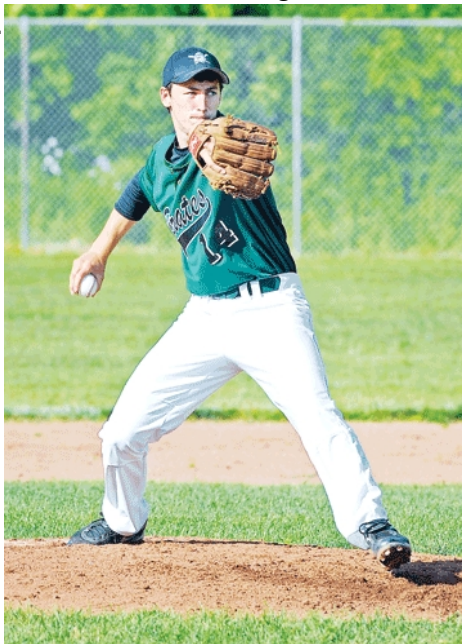


Defense, 'small ball' top priority list for Pirates baseball

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
Wednesday, 22 May 2013 14:46

Don't expect the Port Washington High School baseball team to be giving away many games this season.

At least not if you're coach Nicholas Wycklendt, who's counting on the Pirates to sharpen their play in his second year at the varsity helm.



"I'm really excited. I think we will be strong defensively and be a lot better at the plate with our bat control and discipline at the plate," Wycklendt said.

"The kids worked hard in the off-season and will be up to the challenge. We're really looking forward to the season."

Last year, Port showed potential on the way to a 10-19 season that included a 6-12 record in North Shore Conference play. However, the Pirates struggled at times with fundamentals and had five one-run losses.

"I think we're going to be more savvy and smart. We should be able to keep ourselves in more games and win more one-run games," Wycklendt said.

Port lost five of last year's players to graduation, including starters Taylor Devenport, Max Kaske and Zach Hauser, who provided much of the team's run production.

However, the Pirates have plenty of veteran talent with players such as seniors Derek Haley (pitcher, outfield), Aaron Brockman (catcher, pitcher), Mitchell Schmit (second base) and Nick

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Kaiser (outfield) and juniors Kiley Prellwitz (outfield, pitcher), Mitch Bartlein (shortstop, pitcher), Aidan Wojciehowski (first base, pitcher) and Alec Huebner (outfield).

Juniors Sam Lepak and Mike Herlache and sophomore Ben Schueller are expected to share time at third base.

Wycklendt expects Haley to be the ace of a pitching rotation that also includes Brockman and Prellwitz. Last year, Haley had a 4-4 record and 4.20 earned-run average in NSC games and received honorable mention in all-conference voting.

Providing relief and spot starts will be Wojciehowski, Bartlein and junior Kyle Engels.

After relying heavily on power hitting last season, the Pirates should be able to find other ways to manufacture runs, their coach believes.

"We'll do a little more 'small ball' with singles and doubles this year," Wycklendt said. Prellwitz, in particular, will help lead the charge with his hitting skills as a third-year varsity player, he added.

How far the Pirates can climb up the conference standings remains to be seen, but Wycklendt expects them to hold their own with all opponents.

"Our goal is to not get swept by anyone, which would keep us at least .500," he said.

Port will start the season with a whirlwind stretch this week that includes a doubleheader in a high-profile venue: the Metrodome in Minneapolis.

After a 5:30 p.m. season opener at Plymouth on Thursday, the Pirates will host Greendale at 5:30 p.m. Friday and travel by bus to Minnesota on Saturday for a 2:30 p.m. twin bill against Pewaukee. The trip was arranged with an invitation from Pewaukee, which has made the trip for Metrodome dates for several years.

"We're really excited about getting to play in a Major League stadium," Wycklendt said of the park, which is the former home of the Minnesota Twins.

"It's a chance you don't get too often."

On May 28, Port will open its conference schedule with a 5:30 p.m. home game against Whitefish Bay.

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Image Information: SENIOR DEREK HALEY is expected to be one of the top pitchers on this year's Port Washington High School baseball team. Photo by Sam Arendt