**Rockets retool:**

Written by MITCH MAERSCH
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 16:30

## Graduated baseball talent leaves CG-Belgium rebuilding with youth

The Cedar Grove-Belgium baseball team lost six players from last year to graduation, and their absence is showing.

With only two seniors on their roster, the Rockets are going through growing pains early this season, managing to split their first two games with less-than-super performances.

Monday was low point with a 4-2 home loss to Oostburg in a Central Lakeshore Conference contest.

"We had five errors and probably 12 mental errors that cost us runs," Rockets coach Mike Ruppel said.

"We had a stretch in the sixth inning where we had two or three errors in a row. They basically bunted three times. We couldn't get an out."

The Rockets spread their mistakes among base running, throwing, fielding and communicating.

"I hope they think about it long and hard and come to practice with a little intensity," Ruppel said of his players.

"We can't play the way we're playing right now. We've got a young team that just has a lot to learn."

Starting pitcher Spencer Bares worked the first six innings, striking out 11, but the Rockets didn't make plays behind him.

David Niebauer pitched a scoreless seventh.

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Offensively, Cedar Grove-Belgium got one hit apiece from Brandon O'Neil (a double), Christian O'Donnell, Jim Simmelink, Niebauer, Justin Obbink and Bares.

This is the first season in school history the Rockets have varsity and junior-varsity teams. The increased numbers reflect interest in a program that won an outright CLC title and went 14-9 record last year and was 15-8 and shared the league crown the year before.

"A little bit of success goes a long way," Ruppel said.

Bares, a junior, is back after earning All-CLC honors as a utility player. He's expected to be the ace of the pitching staff this season.

Last year, Bares hit .397 with 16 RBI. When he's not pitching, Bares will play shortstop.

Other members of the pitching staff will be juniors Drew Emperley and sophomores Obbink and Niebauer.

In the outfield, the Rockets are led by O'Donnell, an all-league first-team centerfielder. Last year, he hit .377 with seven RBI and was errorless in the field.

O'Neil, a senior, and Obbink will split time at catcher.

Rounding out the infield will be junior Brian Mueller (third base), Niebauer (second base) and sophomore Brett Michaels (first base).

Juniors Alex Claerbaut, Ross Kaat and Jacob Winker are slated for the outfield.

Bares and O'Donnell will lead the team at the plate.

"Both of them are bigger, stronger," Ruppel said. "Christian is quick on the bases. For a young player, Spencer has a compact swing."

The Rockets' goal is to hit at least .300 as a team, Ruppel said. He knows his team is young but is impressed by its work ethic.

"Eight or nine players put in a ton of time in the off-season, and I'm looking for good things this season," Ruppel said.

CG-Belgium 3, Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah 2

Bares hit a game-winning, RBI triple with one out in the bottom of the seventh inning to lift the host Rockets in their season opener last Friday.

The Elkhart Lake centerfielder almost ran the ball down, but Mueller scored from first after reaching on a walk.

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Simmelink pitched the first four innings, striking out two and walking two.

Obbink worked three shutout innings in relief for the win. He struck out three and walked none.

"The last three innings, Elkhart Lake didn't get a hit," Ruppel said. "I thought Jim pitched a good game, but he just didn't work ahead."

The Rockets scored two runs in the first inning before going silent until the seventh.

O'Neil led off with a double, and scored on Bailey Blaubach's single. A hit batter moved Blaubach to second base, and O'Donnell singled him home.

This week, the Rockets are scheduled to continue CLC play with a 5:30 p.m. game at Ozaukee on Wednesday and a 3:30 p.m. home doubleheader against Random Lake on Friday.

Cedar Grove-Belgium will then host 5:30 p.m. games against Howards Grove on June 10 and Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah on June 11.

Image Information: CEDAR GROVE-BELGIUM INFIELDER David Niebauer tried to dig out a low throw before a sliding Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah runner reached second base.
Photo by Sam Arendt