

Trio of Hawks swoop up top NSC honors

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Nennig, Weisflog, Lukas garner first-team accolades in vote of baseball coaches

It's not unusual for the Grafton Black Hawks to have a baseball player earn All-North Shore Conference first-team honors each summer.

But even coach Brian Durst had to do a double-take when a trio of Hawks received top recognition in the coaches' balloting.



Al Nennig

"We've have five or six first-team players in my 13 years as coach, but we've never had three in one season," said Durst, who guided the Hawks to a share of sixth-place in the conference.

"I guess it says something about the quality of our players. Some of them had really outstanding seasons."

Grafton's first-team trio includes outfielder Al Nennig, infielder Choo Weisflog and utility player Nate Lukas.

Nennig, a senior, capped an outstanding prep career by hitting .361 and driving in 18 runs in NSC play.

The top vote-getter among all-league outfielders, Nennig had a .525 slugging average that included two doubles, three triples and a homer and scored 18 runs.

Nennig had a .483 on-base percentage and was flawless defensively. He committed no errors and had 40 putouts and five assists.

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One of the top all-around athletes in Grafton school history, Nennig is also a state-champion swimmer who will take his skills in that sport to Denison University in Ohio this fall.

“Alex is a special athlete who was able to compete in two sports at the highest level for four years,” Durst said.

“Swimming is his passion, but he’s also an excellent baseball player. I just wanted him to come out and enjoy the sport, and he did a great job.”

A four-year starter, Nennig is among the career leaders in most major offensive categories.

Weisflog continued his excellent play on the way to All-NSC first-team honors for the second straight season.

He batted .415 in league play, scored 23 runs, drove in 15 runs and had a .477 slugging average. He struck out only three times.

Weisflog, who co-captained the Hawks with Lukas, had a .493 on-base percentage and led the conference with 15 steals.

“Choo was the second-highest vote getter among the infielders,” Durst said. “He’s really been a productive player for three years.

“He always finds a way to make good things happen.”

With a .377 career batting average, Weisflog is poised to become “one of the best players ever at Grafton,” Durst said.

Lukas was the Hawks’ most versatile players, excelling at the plate and on the mound.

He batted .431, third best in the league, and had 17 RBI. His team-best .636 slugging average included seven doubles and two homers.

Lukas had a .540 on-base percentage and a .988 fielding percentage, committing only one error.

As a pitcher, the left-hander worked a league-high 57 innings and posted a 3-5 record and 2.70 earned-run average. He had six complete games, struck out 47 and walked 16.

“Nate was a workhorse on the mound, but I was really impressed with his hitting,” Durst said.

“He’s always been a good at-bat, but his power numbers just surged this year. He did a great job of using his leverage.”

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Two local players were named to the all-conference second team: Grafton first baseman Beau Benzschawel and Port Washington outfielder Kiley Prellwitz.

Benzschawel, a junior who also played third base, batted .352 and drove in 22 runs, fourth-best in the league.

His .556 slugging average included two doubles and three homers, and he had a .462 on-base percentage.

“Beau is definitely someone who is respected and feared in our lineup,” Durst said. “Like Nennig, he has the ability to change the game with one swing.

“It seemed that whenever he drove in runs, we won the game.”

Prellwitz, a junior, was one of the bright spots for a Port team that went 2-16 in the conference.

He batted .317, had two doubles and a triple and stole 10 bases in 11 tries. A solid contact hitter, he struck out only five times and drew seven walks.

Prellwitz shined defensively, committing only one error as a centerfielder. He finished with a .995 fielding percentage and 43 putouts.

“Kiley had pretty good offensive season, and I thought he was the best defensive outfielder in the conference,” Port coach Nicholas Wycklendt said.

“He had a solid junior season and can be even better next year.”

Among the local players who received honorable mention in the coaches' voting were Grafton's Brett Rasmussen and Port Washington's Aaron Brockman, Mitch Bartlein and Sam Lepak.

Rasmussen, a senior, was singled out as a designated hitter. He hit .256, had a .467 on-base percentage and led the conference with 16 walks.

Helping set the table as the Hawks' leadoff hitter, Rasmussen scored 12 runs.

“Brett kept finding ways to get on base. He was such an important part of our offense,” Durst said.

Rasmussen also contributed as Grafton's No. 2 pitcher. He was 3-2 with a 2.90 ERA in 29 innings.

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Brockman, a senior, was recognized as a pitcher. Despite a 2-7 record, he had a 2.40 ERA and struck out 33 in 46 innings.

Brockman pitched a complete game when the Pirates upset Homestead, 6-5, in a WIAA regional semifinal game July 10.

“Aaron did a great job as our No. 2 pitcher,” Wycklendt said. “He kept us in a lot of games.”

Bartlein, a junior infielder, batted .259 and had six RBI. He came on strong late in the season and also contributed as a pitcher.

“Mitch played wherever we needed him and did a really good job,” Wycklendt said.

“Next year, we expect him to be our No. 1 pitcher.”

Lepak, a junior, was honored as a utility player. Playing first base, third base and catcher, he hit .255 with two doubles and seven RBI.

He had a .981 fielding percentage, committing only two errors.

“Sam gave us a good bat in the lineup and was able to play a number of positions,” Wycklendt said. “He had a very good season.”