

O'Donnell earns nod as CLC's best

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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CG-Belgium's hard-hitting senior named Player of Year on all-league first team that also includes Wichmann, Bares

Central Lakeshore Conference baseball coaches didn't have to look hard to find their 2013 Player of the Year.

They merely had to check the statistical numbers compiled by the best all-around performer on a championship team for a logical choice.



Cedar Grove-Belgium centerfielder Christian O'Donnell received the honor after leading his squad to a share of the CLC title. All the senior did as the Rockets' leadoff hitter was bat .500 in conference play, score 22 runs and post a .845 slugging average.

O'Donnell had five doubles and two triples, walked nine times and struck out only three times on his way to a .726 on-base percentage.

He stole 20 bases in 22 attempts and showed his glove skills with a .929 fielding average.

"Christian's just an excellent all-around ball player," said Cedar Grove-Belgium coach Mike Ruppel, whose team won its third straight league championship by sharing the crown with Sheboygan Lutheran/Kohler.

"He's a solid contact hitter with gap power and great speed. He was usually the one getting on base first when we did our scoring."

O'Donnell, who plans to play baseball next year at Wisconsin Lutheran College, earned All-CLC first-team honors for the third straight season. He was one of six unanimous first-team

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selections in the coaches' voting and became the league's inaugural Player of the Year.

Other local players named to the first team were Cedar Grove-Belgium's Spencer Bares and Ozaukee's Jeremy Wichmann.

Bares, a junior infielder, excelled as the Rockets' No. 3 hitter. He batted .433 in CLC games and never struck out in 53 at-bats.

Bares led Cedar Grove-Belgium with 17 RBI and had a .585 slugging percentage with seven doubles and one triple. He walked 10 times, stole seven bases, scored 16 runs and had an on-base percentage of .545.

"Spencer is a solid player who knows the hitting zone very well," Ruppel said. "He doesn't swing at bad pitches."

Bares received first-team honors for the second straight year, having earned a spot as a utility player last season. He was the Rockets' No. 1 pitcher early this season, posting a 3-1 record before being removed from the rotation due to an elbow injury.

Wichmann, a sophomore infielder, received first-team honors after being named to the second team last year.

He batted .482 in CLC games and had a .732 slugging average with eight doubles and three triples.

Wichmann drove in 20 runs and had a .539 on-base percentage.

"Jeremy's only a sophomore, but a lot of players looked up to him for what he accomplished," Ozaukee coach Bob Kiefer said.

"He's got a lot of talent, and he's going to get bigger and stronger."

Wichmann also received coaches' votes as a pitcher. He had a 4-3 record and 4.28 earned-run average and struck out 49 batters in 35 innings.

This year's all-conference second team includes three local players: Ozaukee's Zac Beck and Lee Wysocki and Cedar Grove-Belgium's David Niebauer.

Beck, a junior catcher, batted .333 with four doubles and 14 RBI. He struck out only four times.

Even more impressive was Beck's defensive development.

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"Zac learned as the season went on and got better and better," Kiefer said. "His ability to block pitches probably saved us a half-dozen games.

"He didn't have a lot of experience behind the plate before this year, but he became one of the conference's top catchers."

Wysocki, a junior outfielder, shined in his first year with the Warriors. He hit .327, drove in 12 runs and drew 15 walks.

Flashing his speed, he stole 12 bases in 13 attempts and chased down fly balls while compiling a .980 fielding percentage with only two errors.

"He was our fastest player and made some amazing plays in the field," Kiefer said. "He was a great addition to our team."

Wysocki also contributed as a pitcher, posting a 3-1 record with a 3.75 ERA.

Niebauer, a sophomore, received recognition as a utility player. He hit .333 with a .500 on-base percentage while playing second base, third base, shortstop and pitcher.

Niebauer scored 12 runs and drew 13 walks. He had an overall .933 fielding percentage.

"David is a great kid who can play any position," Ruppel said. "Defensively, he was our most skilled player."

The Rockets' top relief pitcher, Niebauer had four saves and a 2-0 record and 2.80 ERA in 14 innings.

Four local players received honorable mention in the coaches' balloting: Cedar Grove-Belgium's Brandon O'Neil and Jim Simmelink and Ozaukee's Mitch McConnell and Joe Schauer.

O'Neil, a senior catcher, hit .357 in the cleanup spot, with five doubles and seven RBI. He had a .428 slugging average and .446 on-base percentage and scored 11 runs.

"Brandon caught every single game for us, and we had four doubleheaders," Ruppel said. "He did a solid job as our No. 4 hitter and was 10 times better defensively than he was as a junior."

Simmelink, a junior outfielder, earned recognition despite missing six games due to a finger injury. He hit .424 with a .484 on-base percentage, drove in eight runs and scored 13 runs.

"Jim could have been on the second team if he hadn't gotten hurt," Ruppel said.

"He was very consistent. We were a better team with him in the lineup."

McConnell, a sophomore infielder, had a sharp eye at the plate, batting .333 and walking 18 times. He drove in nine runs and scored eight times.

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"Mitch is a good young player who should only get better," Kiefer said.

Schauer, a junior, had a solid year at first base. He batted .250 with two doubles and four triples and drove in 17 runs.

Schauer had a .975 fielding percentage and "was really good around the base," Kiefer said.

Image Information: CEDAR GROVE-BELGIUM SENIOR Christian O'Donnell batted .500 in Central Lakeshore Conference play this season on his way to the league's inaugural Player of the Year honor. Photo by Sam Arendt