Madonna adding pitching strength

BY C.J. RISAK
STAFF WRITER

There's a bit of rebuilding to do for Madonna University's baseball team, and coach Mike George has wasted no time tackling that task.

Some of the notable losses are pitchers Mike Hocking and all-NAIA District selection Chris Klug; first baseman Ernie Bowling, a two-time all-district pick; shortstop Jeremy Krol; and part-time center fielder starter Kevin Learned. All have completed their eligibility.

But there's something else George would like to lose — the poor attitude that infested certain members of the team the last half of the '92 campaign, during which the Crusaders slipped from 21-6 to a final 29-22, going 8-16 over the final three weeks.

"We're going to have a wholesale attitude change," promised George.

He embarked on that mission by signing players possessing what he believes to be "fierce, competitive attitudes." Already committed to Madonna are Alpena natives Chad Zann, a pitcher/first baseman, and Tim Kasoyloski, a second baseman.

Steve Zann, a catcher and Chad's older brother, is expected to transfer from Central Michigan with three years of eligibility remaining starting next season.

George added three more to his list of recruits last week when he got commitments from Rob Valentino, a pitcher/outfielder from Dearborn Divine Child; Craig Peterson, a pitcher/outfielder from Milford; and Craig Overaitis, an outfielder from Livonia Franklin and Henry Ford Community College.

Of his two new pitchers, George said: "They've both got size, both are athletes. They're going to make an impact."

Valentino comes with star-quality talent. The 6-foot-3, 185-pound right-hander was 8-1 for the Falcons entering Saturday's district play.

"He'll go both ways for us," said George, insisting Valentino — also an outstanding basketball player — could play in the field when not pitching. "He's a very, very intense kid. He's a fastball pitcher and he's got a good overhand curve."

His coach at Divine Child, Mark Falvo, also serves as pitching coach for Madonna. George said Falvo would work with Valentino on a split-finger football and a change-up.

Peterson is not only identical in size to Valentino, but his other attributes are mirror-like, too. He was 7-1 for Milford this season and, according to George, is "totally committed to the game. He's going to do what it takes to win." Peterson is a "relatively hard thrower" with good control.

Overaitis, a 5-10, 185-pound left-handed hitter, will have two years of eligibility left. George is hoping he can help replace departing slugger Bowling. "He's got some power," the Crusader coach said of Overaitis. "He's got some pop in his bat."

Last season, Overaitis hit six homers in 46 games for Henry Ford CC. He batted .457 with 29 runs batted in. "We've got to do something to replace Ernie," said George. "I don't know if we can, but we'll try."

New mound recruits Valentino, Peterson and Zann, combined with redshirt freshman Mike Grahl and returnees Dennis Hamilton, Jeff Kügelman and Lou McKaig should provide George with a solid corps of starters. "As far as pitching goes, we're in good shape," he said.

If he can replace Bowling's bat and infuse his team with a tough-to-the-finish attitude, the Crusaders may make more than a token, one-day appearance in the 1993 District 23 tournament.

Glenn peaking at right time

BY BRAD EMONS
STAFF WRITER

'I always feel confident if we play good defense and Aaron (Scheffer) pitches well. I feel that if we can beat CC, we can beat anybody.'

Norm Hoenes

It was mid-May and Westland John Glenn baseball coach Norm Hoenes admitted, "I was ready to put the bats and balls away."

The struggling Rockets looked anything but a state Class A semifinalist at the time, but Hoenes, now in his 27th season as varsity coach, watched in amazement, only a matter of weeks, as his club was transformed into a state contender.

Glenn's 17-7 record (after a 2-6 start) pales in comparison to Friday's semifinal opponent Lapeer West (36-4), or the other two final four qualifiers — Birmingham Brother Rice (28-10) and Denison (34-5).

But the Rockets may well be the most dangerous after knocking off No. 1 Redford Catholic Central, 5-4, in last weekend's regional semifinal.

"I always feel confident if we play good defense and Aaron (Scheffler) pitches well," Hoenes said. "I feel that if we can beat CC, we can beat anybody."

Scheffler, a junior right-hander, has come on after an 0-3 start, winning six of his last seven decisions. Number two starter Chris Kirkey, a senior right-hander with a 6-0 mark, has been consistent all season.

"Our team ERA (earned-run average) is around 2.00 and our team batting average is .298, that's usually good enough," Hoenes said. "And now our fielding percentage (as a team) is up to .908, but it was in the 70s for quite awhile."

That's when Hoenes made some late season defensive and lineup adjustments, moving senior Greg Tamas back to his original position at third, and bringing up sophomore Derek Besco up from the JV squad to fill in for the injured Bobby Hayes at short.

"Tamas has been a steady player," Hoenes said. "He's leads off and has been hitting around .385. He doesn't strike out much and always puts the ball in play.

"But he makes steady plays at third and he's a heady player. He's a 4.0 (grade-point) student in the classroom. We have a lot of players who are doing well in the classroom so you could say we're a smart team."

Senior center fielder John Ward, whose two-run homer provided Glenn with the final margin of victory over CC, is the team's second leading hitter at .350. Sophomore DH Mike Bint, meanwhile, hovering near .300.

"The rest of the guys are in the .280 range," Hoenes said.

Glenn's road to Battle Creek actually started during the final stages of the regular season.

The Rockets blanked Western Lakes Activities Association champ North Farmington, 7-0, and smacked WLAA-Western Division champ Walled Lake Western, 9-2, in a makeup game.

Glenn then drew Ypsilanti in the predistrict qualifier as Scheffer outdueled Braves ace Chris Desselliier, 3-0.

"That was a tough opener," Hoenes recalls. "Our season could have been over on May the 14th."

Glenn added a predistrict win over Plymouth Canton (8-1), followed by district victories over host Ann Arbor Pioneer (6-1) and then Belleville (12-5).

At the regional, Glenn edged CC (5-4) and 10th-ranked Lincoln Park (2-1) to reach the semifinals at Bailey Park in Battle Creek.

Glenn plays Lapeer West at 1 p.m. Friday at Nichols Field at the Bailey Park Complex in Battle Creek, which is located off I-94 (take M-66, Exit 98 north and follow to complex.) The championship is at 1 p.m. Saturday at C.O. Brown Stadium. Tickets are priced at $4 each day for each sport, and admission is good for all games played in that sport all day. An all-tournament ticket (including softball) is $12.

Highly ranked team awaits Rockets

BY BRAD EMONS
STAFF WRITER

Coaches Tim Bradley of Lapeer West and Norm Hoenes of Westland John Glenn will have a reunion of sorts Friday in the state Class A baseball semifinals at Nichols Field in Battle Creek.

It's been 23 years since the two met on the diamond — but neither can recall the meeting.

Bradley was a player at Redford Thurston High in 1969 (under coach Emil Majeski) while a young Hoenes was in his fourth year as coach of the Rockets. That's when both schools were members of the Northwest Suburban League.

"We had a pretty good team that year and if they had a state tournament we might have done pretty well," said Bradley, now in his 12th season as head coach of the Panthers, who are making their first state semifinal appearance.

"My first good team was about '71 with J.P. McBride and that crew," recalls Hoenes, whose team is making their second semifinal appearance. "We were about 31-10 and made it into the regionals. I can't remember much about the '69 season."

Through scouting reports, Bradley and Hoenes should get a little more familiar with each other.

Glenn has become red hot at the right time, winning 13 of its last 14 games, including a 5-4 win over No. 1-ranked Redford Catholic Central in last Saturday's regional at Lincoln Park, Redford.

The Rockets (17-7) struggled early in the season, while Lapeer, the highest ranked team still alive in Class A (No. 3), has been on a roll since opening day, racking up an impressive 31-mark.

"This is the farthest a Lapeer team has gone and naturally the school and our community are excited," said Bradley, whose parents live in Livonia. "We're looking forward to Friday. If we play the way we're capable of, it's going to take an excellent team to beat us. And hopefully the team will play up to it's capabilities."

The Panthers have a decided advantage over their opponents in games played, 40-24.

"We made up all our games that were postponed and I think we played just about every other day during a three-week period to get them all in," Bradley said. "We had eight different pitchers win games during that stretch."

Lapeer West captured the Flint Metro League championship with a 15-1 record and reached the semifinals of the 32-school Greater Flint Tournament, losing to Swartz Creek before avenging that defeat with a 1-0 win in the districts.

In state tournament play, West has come from behind to win four of six games. Last weekend, Lapeer West ousted host Port Huron (7-5) and Howell (10-5) to win the regional.

The pitching staff is led by juniors Mike Thayer (7-1, 2.25 ERA) and Brandon Reed (11-1, 0.41 ERA).

Reed went 6-0 in league play and did not allow an earned run in 37½ innings.

Thayer, meanwhile, also plays third base and is hitting .388.

The team's top hitter is senior catcher Scott Bradshaw, who has 66 hits overall and a .574 average.

"Our strength is our defense and our pitching has been tough," Bradley said. "And we've had timely hitting. We've done that for the most part all year."

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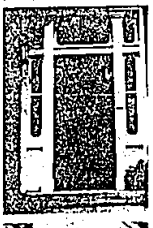

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