

MSU's 'Bobby Baseball' is Big 10's best

BY BRAD MONASTIERE
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Bob Malek's high school baseball career ended on just about the sweetest note possible. It looks like history, to an extent, might be repeating itself.

Malek, a 1999 graduate of Redford Catholic Central High School, was recently named tri-Big Ten Player of the Year for the 2002 season, and could be a high-round draft pick in Tuesday's baseball amateur draft.

Indiana's Kennard Jones and Minnesota's Luke Apert shared honors with Malek, marking the first time three players have shared the award.

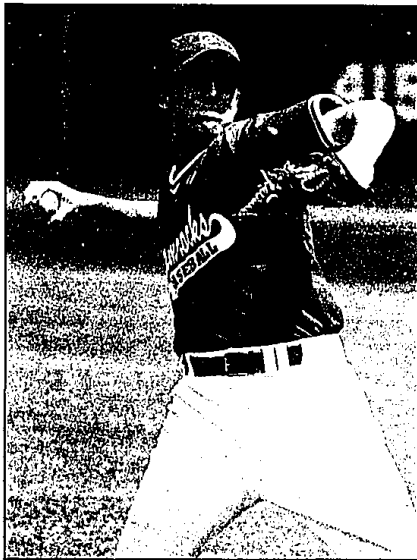
Malek was also named to the All-Big Ten First Team for the second year in a row, making him just the second player from MSU to be named in back-to-back years, after Mark Mulder was named in 1997 and 1998.

Malek, who scored the game-winning run for the Shamrocks when they won the 1999 Division 1 state championship, has put together one of the best offensive careers of any player in Spartan history.

He said he didn't expect to put up the gaudy numbers he has, but knew he was capable of great things.

"When I went in my freshman year, my goal was just to play in half the games, and I ended up playing in 55 of the 56 games I had," said Malek, who resides in Canton. "I was confident I could go in there and contribute, but I didn't expect to do well right away."

Getting named to the Freshman All-American Team after the 2000 season was just the beginning. Malek has etched his name into MSU's record book after two more terrific seasons. In 2002, he batted .394 and slammed a con-



FILE PHOTO BY BRIAN MITCHELL

Aiming high: Michigan State's Bob Malek, shown here when he was a top player at Redford Catholic Central, was recently named co-Big Ten Player of the Year.

ference-leading 19 doubles. He set new career records at the school with 239 hits and 162 RBI in just three seasons.

He ranked second in the Big Ten this season with 144 total bases, 60 runs scored and 62 RBI, while ranking third with 80 hits

and fourth with 13 home runs. His offense played a big part in MSU's third-place league finish, its best in several seasons.

Malek said an improved mental approach to the game, as well as the natural maturation process any 21-year-old goes through

helped him to adjust to the college level of play, and eventually to excel at that level.

"In high school I got worked up more over things," he said. "You have to learn that you can't get too frustrated, because the game of baseball is tough. I learned to look at the big picture more and take things as they came."

Malek has a baseball player's memory. That means, he can recall sequences in games that make you want to sit back and take yourself back to that sunny day with the green grass and sunshine beaming down from the sky.

He recalls just such a day when talking about the pinnacle of his pro-college career, when CC edged Troy 6-5 in one of the most thrilling state championship games in recent memory.

"I hit a double off the wall, but there was a little controversy, because it could have been a home run, but was ruled a ground-rule double," Malek recalled. "We loaded the bases and I ended up coming home on a wild pitch. It was real exciting and just a great way to finish off my career."

That was a great team we had. Almost everyone went on to play college somewhere, with some sport. Casey Rogowski is now in the White Sox system, and we're all still good friends."

Malek pitched a four-hit shutout in the 1999 state semifinals to get the Shamrocks to the championship game. That game alone was sweet redemption for him, after taking a tough loss in the 1998 semifinals.

Malek even made it back to watch his younger sister Liz, a player for Livonia Ladywood's softball team, play on a weekend double-header.

"I don't get a chance to see her play too often, but I try to be there for her as much as I can

and give back a little bit," he said. The player known to his friends as "Bobby Baseball" has shown he has the ability to play at a higher level and is able to adjust on the

■ 'Teams are calling all the time, but you never know what happens so we'll wait and see.'

CC grad Bob Malek
—on his chances in the baseball draft

fly. He spent last summer at the Cape Cod wood bat league, a common stop for top college players in their off-seasons.

Malek struggled at the start of the season, batting just .150 through the first half, but picked it up and hit at a .350 clip the second half of the season.

As he was a highly sought-after player coming out of high school, the process is similar for players who are draft eligible and have the kind of careers Malek had.

He said the process of being recruited by colleges offered him more control than the one going from college to possibly pro baseball.

"Teams are calling all the time, but you never know what happens, so we'll wait and see," Malek said. "I don't even know what team will draft you, where I got to pick what college I wanted to go to."

Malek points to his parents, coaches and Jeff Kaiser, who runs the Downriver Baseball Center, as main inspirations for him reaching the level he has.

CC coach John Salter called Malek not only one of the best players he's ever coached, but one of the best people.

"He's a great kid, more than

just a talented baseball player," Salter said. "He's a team player all the way, and a hard worker."

Malek played the 2002 season in right field after playing his first two years at State in center field. He was also a pitcher in high school.

MSU coach Ted Mahan said in a press statement that Malek adjusted his skills to fit the team concept, one of the highest compliments he could give a player.

"This year we asked him to be more selective and look for more hitting counts in hopes he could hit for more power," Mahan said. "We are very excited that he is the first Michigan State player to earn Player of the Year honors. He has become a better hitter every year."

Although this season ended at the Big Ten Tournament with a loss to Minnesota, the future couldn't be much brighter for a player who does just about everything well on the baseball field. Just like the player, the team improved each of the past three seasons, with potential for more in the future.

"My first two years there, we finished eighth in the Big Ten, and it was frustrating because I had never dealt with losing before," he said. "But this year, we were mostly juniors and seniors and really grew together as a team, and improved to third place."

The door is still open for Malek to return to MSU for his senior season, since he hasn't signed with an agent yet.

Regardless if "Bobby Baseball" signs with an agent, a major league franchise, or returns to be a college student for a fourth season, he's written his name into history, something not many people can claim.

Then again, making history for Bob Malek is just part of the story.

DCI seeking 5-peat in Livonia Collegiate Baseball

BY BRAD EMONS
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The sound of wooden bats returned Wednesday night to Ford Field as the four-time defending champion Decision Consultants, Inc. dropped its season opener to the Lake Michigan Area Rams, 7-1.

DCI manager Mike George and his coaching staff of Frank Corci, Jim Solak and Mario D'Herin have some rebuilding to do after going 28-8-2 last season and 1-2 in the All-American Amateur Baseball Association Tournament in Johnston, Pa. Left-hander Randy Ford, an All-Mid-American Conference pitcher from Eastern Michigan University, has used up his eligibility in the 20-and-under summer circuit after going 10-1 for DCI.

"Our infield defensively is probably the best I've ever coached as far as summer league team is concerned and I think we're pretty solid behind the plate," George said. "But we don't have a Ryan Ford and that makes our pitching suspect."

University of Michigan left-hander Bobby Garza started and went 5.1 innings in the loss to the Rams. He pitched 13 innings for the Wolverines this season with a 1-1 record and an 14.85 earned run average.

FOOTBALL CAMPS

■ The NFWB Football Skills Camp for high school students will be 2-6 p.m. June 17-20 at North Farmington High School. The fee is \$65 and is open to any interested athlete. Campers will learn basic football fundamentals.

The same camp will be offered to middle school students entering grades six, seven or eight next fall 9 a.m. to noon June 19-20 at North Farmington. The fee is \$45.

For more information on the camps, call Rich Burrell at (248) 489-3535.

■ The NFWB Football Skills Academy for high school athletes will have classes at North Farmington High School on the following Wednesdays: June 26, July 10, 17 and 24.

The Rushing Academy will take place 10-11:30 a.m. and the Passing Academy 4-5:30 p.m. The sessions will focus on offensive and defensive skills. The fee is \$40. Contact Burrell at the above number for more details.

SUMMER BASEBALL

Other DCI pitchers include former Redford Catholic Central standout Anthony Toney, who went 5-5 this spring for EMU with a 6.61 ERA. Toney, who leaves Monday for the Central Illinois Collegiate League, struck out 83 batters in 78.1 innings.

"We have to get him in four games so he'll be eligible for our post-season roster," George said.

Other DCI pitchers include Matt Campbell (U-M), left-hander Ollie Husian (U-M), Nate Weller (Oakland University) and Ross Winemko (EMU).

George is also going with a pair of high schoolers on the mound for the first time, left-hander Tim Gray of Jackson High (headed to EMU) and Blissfield's Derrick Feldcamp (going to U-M).

"Those are two very good high school pitchers," George said. "We hope they're good enough to throw at this level."

Bryan Kay, who prepped at Plymouth Canton High and now plays at Siena Heights University, returns at catcher. He'll be backed up by Joe Zacherewski (Western Michigan).

The team's top returning player is third baseman-outfielder Derrick Peterson, who hit .325 for EMU this spring while

appearing in all 56 games. Peterson had 11 homers and 47 RBI.

Peterson, who pitched last year for DCI, is not expected to be in the rotation this summer.

John Sullivan (OU) is back at first base, while Jim Nowicki (Ball State) is the returning shortstop. Nowicki, a part-time player for the 34-28 MAC runner-up Cardinals, hit .271 this spring with a pair of homers and nine RBI.

The second base job will be between Ben Jones, who hit .192 and appeared in 24 games for EMU, and Mike McGavin of Hillsdale College.

The starting outfield will include Jim Geldhof (Central Michigan), Tom Schneeman (Northwood University) and Brendan Hadley (Miami of Ohio). J.D. Leitchman (University of Detroit Mercy) is a utility infielder and outfielder.

"It's also going to take awhile for our kids to adjust to the wood bats coming off their college seasons where they used aluminum," George said.

The Rams, coached by Redford Union High varsity baseball coach Rick Berryman, can be again should offer DCI its stiffest competition.

Other teams in the LCLB

include the Bulls, managed by former Detroit Lions offensive guard Frank Gubler; the Rams' teammates, managed by Rick Radzinski, the Warriors, managed by Mark Weldon; and the Tecumseh (Ontario) Thunder, managed by Rudy Viale.

The Rams feature several players with Ohioversland ties including catcher Brian Campbell, Livonia Stevenson/CMU; pitcher Gary Zielke, Stevenson/Wayne State; outfielder Robby Hudson, Garden City/Jacksonville (Fla.) University; pitcher-infielder Mike Hayes, RU/Madonna University; outfielder Chris Trott, Plymouth Salem/Albion College; and infielder Oliver Wolcott, Canton/Michigan State.

Steve Knibbe, a 6-foot-2, 205-pound right-hander, is the Rams' most experienced pitcher. This spring, Knibbe finished 3-6 for OU with a 6.91 ERA in 56 innings pitched.

Infielders Ty Herriott and Ryan Frieburger, both from OU, hit .273 and .271, respectively.

Rams slam DCI

T.J. Smith's grand slam carried the Michigan Lake Area Rams to a season-opening 7-1 victory Wednesday over defending Livonia Collegiate Baseball League champion Consultants, Inc. in a game played at Ford Field.

Knibbe threw a four-hit, com-

plete game. He struck out 12 in seven innings. The only run was unearned in the top of the seventh.

Smith, who plays at Henry Ford Community College, sparked a seven-run fifth-inning uprising for the Rams.

Hayes added two hits and scored a run. Trott added two hits, while Hudson had two RBI.

Others collecting hits for the Rams included Wolcott, Ryan Frieburger, Brent Scheller and Brian Campbell (Central Michigan).

Schneeman had a double and sacrifice for DCI.

Garza, who worked 5.1 innings, took the loss. He was relieved by Matt Campbell.

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