

Depth to carry Sweet Home baseball in ECIC II



Senior tri-captain Travis Denman returns for his third year with the Sweet Home baseball team. Denman threw a no-hitter last year.

File photo

The Sweet Home baseball team endured a rough 2007 season so hopefully a change in scenery from ECIC I to ECIC II will help the Panthers find success in 2008.

Coach Derek Zgoda feels depth on the roster will be one of the team strengths towards a winning season.

"There are 18 players that have the attitude and ability to make great contributions this season," said Zgoda, whose team finished 2-17 overall last year. "Practices have been extremely productive as the team is focused upon playing together and putting all of their energy into making the season a successful one."

Sweet Home moved down to ECIC II based on student enrollment numbers.

"ECIC II is an extremely strong and competitive division," said Zgoda. "Any team in our division can win the league and the ability gap from top to bottom is miniscule."

Sweet Home is led by senior tri-captain infielders/pitchers Travis Denman and Brian Pappgall and infielder John Graziano.

"All three captains provide a tremendous amount of leadership for our team," said Zgoda. "They are responsible, have a strong sense of work ethic and truly lead by example."

It's Denman's third year on the team. Denman threw a no-hitter against West Seneca West last year and struck out 11 batters to give Sweet Home its first win of the season.

Denman and Graziano are returning ECIC I honorable mention all-stars.

Other returning players include seniors Brian Barnas (pitcher), Chris Hammer (catcher, pitcher) and Aaron Klein (first base) and juniors Ryan Gutt (outfield), Casey Kacz (infield, pitcher), Bryan Price (outfield), Mike Wolcott (outfield, pitcher) and Craig Young (catcher).

"Our team has a strong presence of senior leadership, and a group of players that have the desire

to make this a positive and rewarding season," said Zgoda.

Newcomers to the roster include juniors Alex Frase (catcher), Dan Ministero (infield), Dominick Puntillo (infield, outfield), Phillip Stewart (infield, pitcher), David Wantuck (infield) and sophomores Zach Fumerelle (infield, pitcher) and Cody Stonish (infield, pitcher).

Zgoda said a team goal is to get better each day so they are playing its best basketball when the sectional tournament begins.

"If every player continues to work hard, and embrace the true team concept, I feel that we can have a successful and memorable season," said Zgoda.

Sweet Home opens at 4:30 p.m. on Friday at Clarence.

Sweet Home 2008 Schedule

4-4 at Clarence.....	4:30 p.m.
4-7 Clarence	4:45 p.m.
4-8 Lancaster.....	4:45 p.m.
4-21 East	4:30 p.m.
4-23 at Iroquois.....	4:30 p.m.
4-24 at South.....	4:30 p.m.
4-25 Lake Shore.....	4:30 p.m.
4-28 at W.S. East.....	4:30 p.m.
4-30 Hamburg.....	5 p.m.
5-5 South 4:45	p.m.
5-6 Maryvale	4:30 p.m.
5-7 at East	4:30 p.m.
5-8 Canisius	4:30 p.m.
5-9 Iroquois.....	4:30 p.m.
5-13 at Lake Shore	4:30 p.m.
5-14 W.S. East	4:30 p.m.
5-16 at Hamburg.....	4:30 p.m.
5-19 at Cheektowaga	4:30 p.m.
5-20 at Starpoint.....	4:15 p.m.
5-21 Cheektowaga.....	4:30 p.m.
5-22 at Amherst.....	4:30 p.m.
5-23 at Lancaster	4:30 p.m.

South needs its younger players stepping up

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

With only five returning players from last year's team, many opponents may think Williamsville South baseball will be an easy win this spring.

"A lot of people may look at us and think, not a lot of experience, huge amount of turnover, they're a team that we can beat," said Williamsville South coach Dave Delisanti. "I disagree."

Four of the five returning players - seniors Andy Esposito and Alex Walkowski and juniors Matt Minervini and Tom LiSacchi - were starters last year. Walkowski and Minervini are back at second and third base, respectively. Esposito and LiSacchi, the team co-captains, will start in center and left field, respectively.

Delisanti said Esposito uses his speed to run down balls in the outfield and steal bases.

"He's also an outstanding leader," said Delisanti. "He makes guys accountable for their actions. He holds them to high expectations."

LiSacchi, a JV call-up last year, led the team in hitting with a .400 batting average. LiSacchi is a left-handed batter and will bat second in the order behind Walkowski.

"Tom is not a flashy player but gets the job done," said Delisanti. "He's very fundamentally sound. He gets a great jump on the ball and can bunt and move runners over."

Delisanti said Walkowski is an aggressive base runner with solid defensive skills that makes things happen in the batting order. Walkowski recorded seven RBIs

and scored nine runs last year. He is the team's only returning all-star (ECIC II honorable mention). Junior Joe Ziemecki will back up Walkowski.

Minervini has been on varsity since getting called up at the end of his freshman year.

"The big thing with him is confidence," said Delisanti. "Last year he played like he didn't belong but he has shown the confidence needed this year to secure himself as a solid varsity player."

Minervini is also the only returning pitcher on the staff. Oth-

ers who can throw are senior Ryan Miller, juniors Zach Murray, Andy Diakun, Christian Kranz and sophomores Daren Powers and Nick Schuh. Delisanti said Kranz, a left-hander, and Schuh should come out of the bullpen.

"We have a lot of depth that is unproven," said Delisanti. "The work ethic is there. It's a matter of the guys stepping up and filling in the roles."

The catching duties will be handled by junior Austin White or senior Tim Braunscheidel. As of press time, White is the starter but Delisanti said Braunscheidel

has been pushing him and will see significant playing time.

Delisanti said for White to be successful, he needs to be committed and focused.

"He will be an outstanding catcher if he does those things," said Delisanti. "He has all of the tools."

Braunscheidel has been in the South baseball program for five years and was on varsity last year.

At shortstop, it will either be freshman Phil Stasiak or Schuh. Both can also play in the outfield.

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Division

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both quick and could leadoff the batting order, Davis said. Gallson can also play center field.

The pitching staff, which Davis calls a team strength, will feature Yanity, Hays, Duke and Jeffords. Statistically, Yanity is the most accomplished returning pitcher. Last year, the left-hander sported a 3.50 earned run average and held opponents' batting averages to .262.

If Yanity is pitching, Jeffords might play at first base. Jeffords can also play in the outfield. Jeffords, also a lefty, came out of the bullpen last year and finished with a 3.50 ERA, a 1-0 record, and held opponents to a .255 batting average.

"He throws strikes and gets people out," said Davis. "He keeps guys off balance."

Davis said Hays has a couple of pitches that keeps hitters off balance and Duke is a competitor who never wants to come out of the game.

The rest of the team includes Gaughan (second base or outfield), returning junior infielder Tom Ponticelli (ECIC II second-team selection) and newcomers of senior outfielder Aubrey Gibert, senior first baseman Mike Gruttaduria and junior third baseman D.J. Balduf. Balduf played JV last year. Gruttaduria played JV his freshman and sopho-

more years and missed the entire 2007 season with a broken right femur bone he suffered while playing for the school's Federation hockey team last year.

Overall, Davis likes his team's versatility.

"For example, all of our infielders can play other infield positions," said Davis.

He also thinks team speed will be a team strength. He said offensively, his team will need to do the little things to have success like bunting teammates over and putting the ball into play.

Defensively, he hopes his team will be better. Seventy of the 180 runs allowed last year were unearned.

And if the team isn't playing up to its potential, Davis has told the team that there are three JV second-year players who could be called up to play.

Because of student enrollment, Amherst has moved from ECIC II to ECIC III. Davis feels all his team needs to do to have success is execute.

"We have a plan in place," said Davis. "There are no excuses. They need to execute."

Amherst's first game of the season versus Williamsville East last Friday was canceled and rescheduled for May 1. A game to look out for will be on April 22 when the Tigers host Canisius. Davis has dubbed the game

"Throw Back the Clock" game as Amherst will wear retro jerseys from the late 1980s and use wooden bats.

Amherst Central 2008 Schedule

4-7 South.....	4:30 p.m.
4-10 Ken West	4:30 p.m.
4-11 at Tonawanda (Veteran's Park).....	4:30 p.m.
4-12 at Grand Island	11 a.m.
4-21 at Depew (Dawson Field)	4:30 p.m.
4-22 Canisius	4:30 p.m.
4-23 at Maryvale	4:30 p.m.
4-24 Cheektowaga	4:30 p.m.
4-28 at Pioneer (Arcade Park)	4:30 p.m.
4-30 at Starpoint.....	4:30 p.m.
5-1 East	4:30 p.m.
5-2 Grand Island.....	4:30 p.m.
5-5 Tonawanda.....	4:30 p.m.
5-7 Depew.....	4:30 p.m.
5-9 Maryvale.....	4:30 p.m.
5-12 at Cheektowaga	4:30 p.m.
5-14 Pioneer	4:30 p.m.
5-16 Starpoint.....	4:30 p.m.
5-17 at Lake Shore New Era Tournament	10 a.m.
5-19 at South.....	4:30 p.m.
5-21 at East	4:30 p.m.
5-22 Sweet Home	4:30 p.m.
5-23 at Ken West.....	4:30 p.m.

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