

Four Lake Flyers headline All-Wood County baseball team (6-9-12)



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Four Lake Flyers highlight the first-team selections of the 2012 All-Wood County baseball team.

Lake seniors Corey Hotmer, Jake Materni and Josh Tantari, and sophomore Jayce Vancena were all picked to the first team.

The Flyers won the Northern Buckeye Conference and a Division III district title this season.

Eastwood and Elmwood each had two players selected to the first team. Senior Kris Hayward and sophomore Nick Vespi were the picks from Eastwood, while seniors Jeff Vanscodor and Conlan Varty were the picks from Elmwood.

Otsego junior Nate Hackworth, Lakota junior Tiger Jaso, Bowling Green senior Mason Mayberry, Northwood junior Nick Russell, Perrysburg senior Hunter Smith, and North Baltimore junior Jordan Watson complete the 14-player first team.

The team was selected by members the Sentinel-Tribune sports staff and is not position specific.

Tantari — a four-year starter for the Flyers and the only repeat first-team selection on the All-County team — was Lake’s No. 1 pitcher, as well as its leadoff hitter.

On the mound, Tantari finished 6-3 with a 3.29 earned-run average, recording 65 strikeouts in 44 2/3 innings pitched.

“I’m really going to miss coaching that kid, because he’s such a great competitor,” said veteran Lake head coach Greg Wilker. “I’ve only had a handful of four-year starters, because not many kids are ready to start as a freshman. But he was ready to start as a freshman for me.

“It was nice to see a young man like that mature into his body and have the success that he’s had for four years.”

Tantari was also an integral part of the Flyers’ lineup. An outfielder when not pitching, Tantari batted .324 with a team-high 32 runs scored and 13 stolen bases.

“It doesn’t matter if he was at the plate or on the mound, he’s going to give you everything he has and compete,” Wilker said. “That’s all a coach can ask for all the time.”

Like Tantari, Materni was important on the mound and in the field for the Flyers. Materni, a first-team All-NBC selection as a pitcher, finished with a 7-0 record on the mound, with a 1.92 ERA and 32 strikeouts in 47 1/3 innings pitched.

Materni started off slow offensively, but finished with a .284 batting average with 20 runs and 12 RBI.

“I’ve been coaching a long time and I’ve been blessed with some great third basemen, but I’ve never had anyone better defensively than Jake Materni,” Wilker said. “He was very composed and very poised on the mound at all time. He just never got rattled out there.”

Continuing the theme of dual-threat players from Lake is Vancena, who stepped up for the Flyers in his sophomore season. The big righty recorded 10 saves to go with a 3-0 record and 2.14 ERA. He struck out 38 batters in 32 2/3 innings.

"He had an outstanding season ... He meant so much to the team this year, whether it was offensively or on the mound," Wilker said. "I've never really used a kid in the role (closer) that Jayce had this year to come in and close. And he played a great first-base for us defensively."

At the plate, Vancena batted .351 with one homer, 23 RBI, and 17 runs scored.

"To me he was a three-way threat, whether it was at the plate, defensively, or on the mound," Wilker said. "The kids had tremendous confidence in him. When he came in, they figured the game was over, and it was."

Completing the foursome from Lake is Hotmer, who led the Flyers in hitting. The outfielder batted .381 and led the team with 30 RBI to go along with a home run and 23 runs scored.

"The big thing with Corey is he has tremendous hand-eye coordination. He was a very tough out all year," said Wilker, adding that Hotmer struck out only eight times in 108 plate appearances. "And he hit the ball hard. It's not like he was just dinking and dunking."

"He was a big part of the middle of our lineup. If we had guys on in front of him he was going to find a way to bring them in most of the time."

For Eastwood, Vespi was the clear-cut ace for an improved Eagle team under first-year head coach Kevin Leady.

The lefty went 3-3, with all three games he lost being by the score of 2-1. He had a 1.39 ERA with 64 strikeouts in 45 1/3 innings pitched.

"He threw in a lot of our big games last year as a freshman, so we knew he was going to be a big part of what we do," Leady said. "He threw in really every big game we had."

Vespi was named the NBC pitcher of the year. He also contributed on offense and at first base, finishing with a .362 batting average with 20 runs and 14 RBI.

"He really emerged as a leader for us on the hill. Whenever he was there the guys thought that we were going to win, and usually when he did pitch we had a shot," Leady said.

Hayward provided the power punch in the middle of Eastwood's lineup as its cleanup hitter, finishing his career with a strong season. The outfielder led the team with a .418 batting average, four home runs, and 27 RBI. He also had four triples and five stolen bases.

"He sat in the four-hole every game, which was big," Leady said. "I thought we needed some seniors to step up, and he was one of those guys that really stepped up and was a huge contributor for us."

Hayward also pitched, recording a 1.76 ERA with 32 strikeouts in 15 2/3 innings pitched.

"It's a big hole we'll have to replace next year. He was a big senior leader for us and we'll definitely miss him," Leady said. Elmwood's Vanscorder was an offensive machine, batting an impressive .507 with 29 RBI and 29 runs. He also hit a home run and had seven stolen bases. He was the NBC player of the year and a first-team All-Ohio selection.

"Jeff was so consistent as an offensive player this year. He basically drove our bus. He did everything offensively for us," Elmwood coach Kyle Reiser said. "We haven't had many kids ever hit over .500 for us and he did that. He scored 30 runs, had 30 RBI. He drove them in and he got on base. He was definitely an offensive machine. He had an outstanding year." Vanscorder also played a solid center field for the Royals.

"He's as good defensively as he is offensively. He played an awesome center field," Reiser said.

Varty was the Royals' ace on the mound. He finished 6-4 with a 1.69 ERA. He struck out 59 batters in 62 innings pitched. Varty was an honorable mention All-County pick last season.

"He was definitely our ace going into the season and was really the only kid we had that had any experience," Reiser said.

"He pitched in all the big games, and he had a lot of things on his shoulders to go out there and perform and try to carry the load on the mound, and he did that."

"Every time out we had a chance to win when he was on the mound."

For Bowling Green, Mayberry stepped up as the Bobcats go-to pitcher, as well as leading the team in hitting.

Mayberry went 3-3 with a 2.47 ERA, striking out 32 batters in 34 innings pitched.

"He ended up pitching real well for us this year as a senior. He was a very solid first baseman and led the team in hitting. That was his strong point. He was very reliable," BG coach Josh Iler said.

At the plate, Mayberry batted a team-high .412 to go with two homers, 33 RBI and 25 runs scored. Mayberry will play college baseball at the University of Findlay.

"He's just all-around a great kid. He always wanted to work at getting better. He wasn't the guy to leave the field first," Iler said. "He's going to thrive at the next level. He's the type that's going to put the work in, not only academically, but with baseball too."

Northwood's Russell was a leader for the Rangers, producing at the plate, in the field, and on the mound.

Russell batted .507 with 30 runs and 21 RBI. He also hit a home run and stole eight bases.

"Nick has been our leader for three years now," said Northwood coach and father, Dave Russell. "He's our leader on the field and off the field, and in the weight room. He works extremely hard at his game constantly.

"He's one of those leader-type kids ... The team comes first. Wins come first. I couldn't ask any more out of a team leader."

On the mound, Russell finished 3-3 with a 2.47 ERA. He struck out 54 batters in 39 innings pitched. Russell also played a solid shortstop. Russell was an honorable mention pick last season.

"We really didn't have a No. 1 (pitcher). He pitched some big games for us," coach Russell said. "We asked him to step forward for the team this year and pitch, and he jumped right on the mound and did it without batting an eye or asking any questions."

Watson was an integral part of the Tigers' success this season, both on the mound and at the plate.

Watson was NB's ace, finishing 7-4 with a 1.83 ERA. He struck out 132 batters in 84 innings.

"He was very consistent, very solid starting pitcher. Any time we had Jordan starting we just knew we had a very good chance of winning the game," NB coach Marty Gazarek said.

At the plate, Watson batted .362 with 20 RBI and 14 runs scored.

"He kind of took the leadership role a little more. He made a huge jump from being a sophomore. He pitched well last year as a sophomore, but this year he really stepped up," Gazarek said. "Just knowing that he was the No. 1 pitcher, our team needed him to step up and be the pitcher that he was."

Jaso had a stellar year hitting for the Raiders. He led the team with a .577 batting average and 18 stolen bases, and finished with 22 runs and 17 RBI.

"Tiger provided us leadership and the big hit when we needed it," Lakota coach Terry James said. "Tiger's hard work in the batting cage, and on the batting-T specifically, made him the hitter he was. I don't believe there's a better fundamental hitter in the area right now than Tiger is."

Jaso also contributed on the mound, going 2-0 with a 2.42 ERA with 24 strikeouts in 17 1/3 innings. Jaso was an honorable mention All-County pick last season.

Perrysburg's Smith had a standout senior season, catching the eye of college coaches. Smith batted .344 with seven home runs and 25 RBI. He was a first-team All-Ohio pick,

Smith recently signed to play collegiately at Michigan State.

"Being able to drive the ball out of the ballpark and being left-handed, that's rare," Perrysburg coach Dave Hall said. "And not only being a power hitter, but a guy, especially with the new bats, that can hit the ball in the gap and be on third base."

Smith scored 38 runs and stole 18 bases, possessing the rare combination of both power and speed. Smith was an honorable mention All-County pick last season.

"Obviously he developed into a good athlete, because he hit the weight room hard. He worked hard on becoming physically fit, and that's the difference that I think made him the player he was. He just became a physical specimen," Hall said.

Hackworth played an important role for the Knights, both at the plate and in the field.

The shortstop batted .410 with two home runs, 19 RBI, and 22 runs scored.

"From last year to this year he improved drastically at the plate," Otsego coach Aaron Myers said.

"He really improved there, and he was a crucial part of our middle defensively as our shortstop," Myers added. "He was one of the most important, key guys to help us do what we did this year as far as district runner-up."

The following players were named All-County honorable mention:

Andy Fisher and Andrew Herringshaw, Bowling Green; Zach Coffield, Ryan Mang, and Jake Schmeltz, Eastwood; Zach Irick, Elmwood; Casey Conine and Ryan Kohlhofer, Lake; Skylar Hall, North Baltimore; John Segura, Northwood; Hunter Donald and Nate Downs, Otsego; AJ Stockwell, Perrysburg; and Michael Jarosz, Rossford.

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