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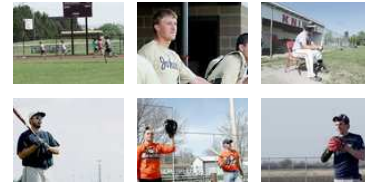
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Athlete of the Week



Five from Perrysburg named to all-county baseball team



WRITTEN BY SENTINEL-TRIBUNE
 WEDNESDAY, 19 JUNE 2013 10:01

Five repeat first-team selections and five players from Perrysburg headline the 2013 All-Wood County baseball team. The repeat picks are: Otsego senior Nate Hackworth; Lakota senior Tiger Jaso; Northwood senior Nick Russell; Lake junior Jayce Vancena; and North Baltimore senior Jordan Watson. Perrysburg's selections are: seniors Kyle Durham, Nick Munger and Steve Slocum; and juniors Mark Delas and AJ Stockwell. Rounding out the first-team are: Otsego seniors Hunter Donald, Drake Johnson and Ryan Smoyer; and Rossford junior Ryan Reed. The 14-player first-team and the 14-player honorable mention list are selected by members of the Sentinel-Tribune sports staff and are not position specific. Hackworth batted .448 for the Knights with 39 hits, including 11 doubles, with 17 RBI, 30 runs scored and 13 stolen bases. Hackworth also pitched and was 2-1 with a 2.86 ERA and 14 strikeouts in 22 innings. Otsego coach Chase Welker said he believes Hackworth is the best defensive shortstop in the Northern Buckeye Conference. "He has good hands, but I think the skill that has developed most since his freshman year is his footwork," he said.

A first-team All-Ohio Division IV selection Jaso batted .672 for the Raiders and added 30 stolen bases and 30 runs scored. He had 39 hits, including two home runs, a triple and nine doubles. He struck out only once this season. He was also the Midland Athletic player of the year. Jaso pitched for Lakota early in the season before an injury forced him to move to the middle infield. As a pitcher, he consistently threw in the mid-80s and recorded 34 strikeouts in 181/3 innings. "He is the best bad-ball hitter I've even seen," Lakota coach Terry James said. "Nobody pitched to him because of his reputation, but he still led the league in hits and batting average. "He is the best base runner I have seen in a long time. He can steal on good catchers and knows how to stretch a single into a double," James added. Russell batted .479 for the Rangers and was 7-3 on the mound. He was named the Toledo Area Athletic Conference player of the year and he helped the Rangers reach the Division IV regional semifinals. "He is going to be missed. He will be hard to replace," said Northwood head coach Dave Russell, who is Nick's father. "He has been a leader since he was a freshman. "He is the coach's kid, so he is under a lot of pressure, but he has handled it well." Russell had 46 hits, including six home runs, with 38 RBI, 40 runs scored and 11 stolen bases. "He is a hard worker. He takes batting in the cage in the morning, at night, in the afternoon, whenever he can. He is constantly in the cage," the elder Russell said. On the mound, Russell had a 2.41 ERA with 53 strikeouts in 491/3 innings of work. Vancena had a strong pitching presence with 75 strike outs in 522/3 innings with a 1.06 ERA. "We knew when he was on the mound we had a good chance at winning," Lake head coach Greg Wilker said about Vancena whose fastball was clocked in the low-90s. At the plate, Vancena contributed 22 RBI, a home run and eight doubles. "An outstanding work ethic. A lot of the younger kids would feed off of him this year," Wilker said. "He showed them how to train the right way."

Watson had an outstanding strikeout/walk ratio this season. He struck out 119 batters and walked only 14 in 73 innings. He had a 7-4 record with four saves and a 1.25 ERA.

Offensively, Watson batted .415 and had 34 hits including nine doubles, four home runs and 23 RBI. He scored 32 runs and had 11 stolen bases.

"He is more of a quiet kid, but he is very competitive," NB head coach Marty Gazarek said. "He doesn't like to lose, so you always felt comfortable with him pitching."

Perrysburg rebounded from a sub-par 2012 season to win the Northern Lakes League title, advance to the Division I regional semifinal and finish ranked in the top 10 in the state.

A first-team All-Ohio selection as a utility player, Delas hit .408 and was 6-1 with three saves. Delas was a pitcher, catcher and third baseman for the Yellow Jackets this season.

"He's just a fantastic hitter; he hits for power, he hits for average. He hits the ball into the gaps pretty good," Perrysburg head coach Dave Hall said. Delas had five doubles, four triples and 31 RBI.

"He became a more patient hitter and that made him a much better player," Hall added.

Delas had a 1.58 ERA with 31 strikeouts in 482/3 innings.

"He was just very, very consistent. What he was able to do was get his curveball and change-up over this year which set up his fastball a little bit better," Hall said.

Durham was a strong defensive presence behind the plate. He also hit .313 with 17 RBI.

"He's probably one of the best blocking catchers, that I've seen," Hall said about Durham's ability to keep pitches from getting past him. "I don't know how many runs he saved. Our kids had confidence they could throw the ball in the dirt on curveballs and he was going to block it.

"He had no errors and maybe one passed ball," he added. "Defensively, he set the tone."

Hall also turned the pitch-calling over to Durham.

"He just has a very good baseball sense," Hall said. "That gave me less to think about and I could concentrate on (defensive) positioning and that kind of stuff."

An honorable mention All-Ohio pick, Munger went 8-1 with one save and a 2.27 ERA with 52 strike outs in 582/3 innings.

"He was able to get his splitter and his off-speed stuff over and that helped his fastball," Hall said. "He just got more calm this year and he handled tight spots pretty well.

"He had one bad inning all year. He got us where we needed to be ... He had to do that for us to succeed; he had to be one of the big guys."

Munger was another versatile player for Hall, also playing in the outfield and at third base. He hit .356 with 16 RBI.

"He was really good in the five spot. He was like a second leadoff man because he walked a ton of times (26)," Hall said. "What he allowed us to do, we were able to stay pretty much with the same nine or 10 kids; he could have played anywhere, but catcher."

Slocum was a four-year starter for the Yellow Jackets.

"Probably one of the better defensive center fielders I've ever had. He could throw people out and catch balls from gap-to-gap," Hall said.

From the leadoff spot, Slocum hit .384 with 22 stolen bases and 27 runs scored. Hall said Slocum set the school career records for hits and stolen bases.

Stockwell was a stalwart defensively at first base and was a key member of the pitching staff, going 7-0 with three saves. He was an honorable mention all-county pick last season.

"Our infielders knew that if they got the ball over there, he was going to make a play on it," Hall said. "He has very good hands."

Stockwell had a 2.15 ERA and 44 strike outs in 421/3 innings.

"What he could do for us, he could start and then he was our closer," Hall said. "On some days we kept him at first, rather than starting him as a pitcher because we were better defensively with him at first and he was very good at closing."

Of the Yellow Jackets' 13 NLL wins, Stockwell had six wins and three saves.

In addition to Hackworth, three other Knights were named to the first-team. The Knights won the NBC title going undefeated at 14-0.

Donald batted .426 with nine doubles and five home runs, 29 RBI, 24 runs scored and seven stolen bases. He was an honorable mention all-county pick last season.

"That is why we had him in that four-spot — to bat in some runs and hit for power. That's exactly what he did," Welker said.

On the mound, Donald went 4-1 with a 3.46 ERA and 45 strikeouts in 261/3 innings.

"Hunter had been a leader for us since he was a sophomore," Welker said. "He is one of the cornerstones of our leadership."

Smoyer was the NBC pitcher of the year going 6-0 with a 0.70 ERA and 58 strikeouts in 40 innings after missing the majority of the 2012 season with a broken thumb.

His greatest strength as a pitcher, Welker said, is his mental approach.

"Every time he steps on the mound he has purpose," Welker said. "He knows how he is going to attack hitters."

Smoyer had 33 hits on the season, including eight doubles, two triples and two home runs. He contributed 21 RBI, 27 runs scored and five stolen bases.

"He has been one of our guys who has been a leader since day one," Welker said.

Smoyer has signed a national letter of intent to play baseball at Notre Dame.

Johnson was the Knights' clutch hitter this season. He batted .365 with nine doubles, four home runs and 31 RBI.

Beyond his hitting, Welker credited Johnson with being "baseball savvy" and showing great determination and work ethic in battling back from multiple injuries over his high school career.

Johnson returned this spring after suffering a broken leg during the 2012 football season.

"Each year he has battled back to get healthy and be on the field," Welker said.

Rossford's Reed was voted the NBC player of the year.

A junior catcher, he batted .527 with 39 hits including nine doubles, two triples, three home runs and 25 RBI. He also scored 23 runs and stole 25 bases.

"Ryan is a very confident ball player. He goes to the plate expecting to get a hit," said Rossford coach Alan Barnum.

"He can hit any pitch and he can take the ball any direction," Barnum added.

The honorable mention selections are: Bowling Green's Nolan Dill and Andy Fisher; Eastwood's Zach Coffield, Skylar Dierker, Ryan Mang, and Grant Peters; Elmwood's Zach Foster; Lake's Brad Ackerman; North Baltimore's Dalton Ishmael; Northwood's Justin Rohrs and John Segura; Otsego's Collin Austin;

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Perrysburg's Gus Dimmerling and Zach Honsberger. Fisher, Coffield, Mang and Segura are repeat honorable mention picks.

LAST UPDATED ON THURSDAY, 20 JUNE 2013 09:08

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