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Vineland High School
Baseball – Midseason report

Handing out midseason grades

The Vineland baseball team is at the halfway point of its season with a 6-5 record and currently is in second place in the Cape-Atlantic League's American Conference. So, with midseason upon us, it's time to hand out some grades.

Overall: B+

Last season Vineland won just six games overall, going 6-17. The Fighting Clan have already matched that win total and also nearly beat two of South Jersey's best teams, Millville and Holy Spirit. The team is playing competitive baseball and has made huge strides from last year. In addition, a playoff berth is a real possibility with the cutoff date May 13.

Offense: B-

The Clan has had some outstanding offensive games, including scoring 24 runs in a 2-game stretch last week against Egg Harbor Township and Lower Cape May Regional. There has been steady production from several players, but Vineland still is struggling with inconsistency when it comes to hitting with runners in scoring position and producing runs with outs, such as sacrifice flies. There also hasn't been enough production late in games when the team is trailing.

Defense: C+

The defense has been serviceable for the most part, but there have been some lapses that have led to some big innings. Senior second baseman Vaughn Watson has been outstanding all year on the defensive side and the outfield defense has been above average for the most part.

Starting pitching: B+

The starting pitching has exceeded expectations. Junior Eli Carter and sophomore Don Money have formed a very good 1-2 punch, and senior Carlos Lebron has been very good in several starts. Carter pitched a great game against Millville, but was saddled with a hard-luck loss when the powerful Thunderbolts rallied to win in their last at-bat.

Relief pitching: C-

There's no sugar-coating it, the relief corps has struggled. However, inexperience has been the key factor, not a lack of effort. Some of the younger pitchers simply haven't been in enough tough situations and are learning how to deal with adversity in pressure-packed games. (more on page 2)

Midseason report card, continued



"Sports do not build character. They reveal it."

John Wooden



Top of the lineup: A

The job of the top two hitters is to get on base, and Watson and Chris Lopez have done just that. Through the first 10 games Watson was leading the team with 14 runs scored and batting .333 with a .500 on-base percentage. Lopez, meanwhile, leads the team with a .462 average and has seven runs and a .529 on-base percentage.

Middle of the lineup: B-

Carter, Lebron, Bobby Romano and Andrew Schwegel have been driving in runs, but need to do it on a more consistent basis if the Fighting Clan hope to compete with the top teams in the CAL. The numbers are respectable, but elite teams are the ones whose middle-of-the-order guys change games around with extra-base hits when the opportunity arises.

Bottom of the lineup: C

You expect your bottom three hitters to contribute some offensively, and they have done that at times. Again, as with any young team, finding consistency is the biggest challenge.

Bench: B-

There hasn't been a lot of action for the bench, but when called upon they have played well. Sophomore catcher Tommy Rodriguez has done a solid job behind the plate when called upon and threw out several runners in a big game against Holy Spirit in the Al Hedelt Tournament's opening round.

Coaching: A

Coach Malatesta has done a very good job of turning Vineland into a contender in a short amount of time. He's matched up pitchers with teams they can be successful against and may have found a lineup now that can score enough runs to make a push for the playoffs. In addition, Malatesta works tirelessly behind the scenes to improve the program. He has put thousands of dollars of his own money toward equipment, run many fundraisers and organized a highly successful preseason trip to Florida.

Schoolwork: B+

These are student-athletes on the Vineland baseball team, and there is a reason "student" comes first in that phrase. To that end, the team members have done a very good job in the classroom. Romano has a grade-point average well above 4.0 and guys like Jeff and Mark Rowan, Lopez, Rickey Hinds and Rodriguez also have high marks in the classroom.

Q & A: senior Josh Stuart

Question: As a junior last season you started out as a reserve player, but with a lot of hard work and patience, by the end of the season you ended up as the starting left fielder. How difficult was it to be patient enough to wait for your chance in the lineup?

Answer: Well, I knew from the start there was a new coach who really didn't know who I was, so I had it in my mind that I wasn't going to start right away. But it wasn't going to stop me from working hard every day to get the starting spot. It was tough being patient, but I never quit.

Q: What did you learn from the experience of having to work your way into the lineup?

A: I learned that it does pay off to work hard because someone is always watching every move you make and the coaches do notice.

Q: You've made a dramatic improvement in your grades and now are looking to continue your education in college. What do you think sparked that change?

A: What really gave me that "spark" was baseball. I want to continue playing baseball wherever I go for college, and I knew the first step was my grades. A college doesn't want someone who is going to slack off and not work as hard in the class as he does on the field.

Q: Last year people recognized you because of your trademark long braided hair. What made you go with a short haircut this year?

A: Ha ha. Yeah, well the hair really meant a lot to me, but baseball means a lot more. I actually think I look more mature and professional.

Q: Do the girls in school like the new look? Or do they prefer the long-haired Josh Stuart?

A: Well, I really can't answer that. I mean, girls did like the hair, but girls still like the short cut, so I really don't have an answer.

Q: How difficult was it to get a new coaching staff halfway through your high school career, and what have you learned from them?

A: It was pretty tough at first because you really had to work to show the new coach what you had because he had no idea who we were. But, I did learn a lot from the new coaching staff. I learned that hard work and discipline pay off.

Q: When you look back on high school years from now, what will you remember most?

A: I guess I'm going to remember how much I changed as a person and how I went from being a kid who didn't care about anything to a man who works hard and gives it his all to succeed.

Q: What did you enjoy most about the baseball team's trip to Fort Pierce, Florida, in March?

A: The whole trip was enjoyable, baseball was amazing, we all had fun, and how a lot of the team bonded and came together more as a unit.

Q: Are you the coolest guy on the Vineland baseball team? If so, why? If not, who is?

A: Well, I ain't the coolest guy on the baseball team. I think Vaughn "Vizzie" Watson is. Kid brings a lot to the table as a leadoff hitter and gets the whole team hyped up.

Q: How do you like the new uniforms the team got this year?

A: I think they are pretty nice. They are way better than the uniforms we had. Last year, the pants were either too tight or too short. And I think the uniforms make us look pretty good out on the field.

Q: Who was your favorite major league player growing up?

A: Has to be Torii Hunter

Q: There's you, a girl, a radio and a table of food on a desert island. Who's the girl, what's on the radio, and what's for dinner?

A: Oh, man. The girl has to be my girlfriend, Rochelle Ocasio. On the radio has to be "Sure thing" by Miguel - has to be romantic - and for dinner some good ol' rice, beans and chicken.

Q: What's the most important thing you've learned about yourself during the last two years of competing for the Vineland High baseball team?

A: The most important thing I learned about myself is that if I put my mind to it, don't let anything get in my way and don't ever quit, I can do it.

Q: What are your plans once you graduate in June?

A: Well, a job so I can have some money on the side when I go to college.



"The key to winning baseball games is pitching, fundamentals and 3-run homers."

-Earl Weaver

"You spend a good piece of your life gripping a baseball, and in the end it turns out that it was the other way around the whole time."

-Jim Bouton

Recent game recaps



VINELAND 5, WILLIAMSTOWN 4 (AL HEDELT TOURNAMENT)

The Clan rallied to win in the seventh inning, as Eli Carter drove in Mike Forte with a game-ending sacrifice fly. Chris Lopez was 3-for-4 with a double and a run, and Jake Brooks and Brandon Velez combined to allow just six hits.

VINELAND 5, HAMMONTON 0

Don Money allowed four hits in five innings to pick up the win.

VINELAND 6, ATLANTIC CITY 3

Carlos Lebron got the win and Andrew Schwegel went 1-for-4 with two runs scored.

MILLVILLE 7, VINELAND 6

A heartbreaker, as the Bolts walked off with a win on Andrew Biggs' 2-run homer in the bottom of the seventh. Vaughn Watson scored three runs and Eli Carter had two RBIs.

VINELAND 12, OAKCREST 8

Mark Rowan went 3-for-4 with a home run and three RBIs to lead an 11-hit attack. Lebron had two hits and two RBIs and got the save.

VINELAND 14, EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP 9

Lebron and Chris Lopez each had three hits and Schwegel had a grand slam and five RBIs. Lebron also homered.

VINELAND 10, LOWER CAPE MAY 3

Carter went 3-for-4 with two runs and an RBI, Money had two RBIs and Lebron scattered six hits for the win.

“If a woman has to choose between catching a fly ball and saving an infant’s life, she will choose to save the infant’s life without even considering if there are men on base.”

-Dave Barry

News and notes

Assistant coach Tim Edmeads and his wife, Jaylene, welcomed a baby boy to their family in mid-April. Now 2-year-old Sophia will have a throwing partner in the new little guy named Tyler. ...Two of Vineland’s senior starters were honored as ‘Athlete of the day’ by The Daily Journal. Center fielder Bobby Romano earned the accolades for his performance in a win over Lower Cape may on April 27. Romano had a 3-run triple in the first inning and also scored two runs, including a steal of home. First baseman Andrew Schwegel had a monster day against Egg Harbor Township the day before, launching a grand slam for four of his season-high five RBIs in a 14-9 win. ... Assistant coach Dave O’Sullivan and VHS trainer Dave Reckenbeil squared off in early April in the Men’s Senior Baseball League. Reckenbeil slugged an RBI double off O’Sullivan in the top of the tenth inning as part of a five-run rally that lifted the Egg Harbor Township Orioles to a 14-9 win over the Forked River Bees. O’Sullivan went 1-for-5 at the plate, but did have two outstanding defensive plays, one at shortstop and one on the mound. O’Sullivan set a career high for RBIs in this past Sunday’s win over the Margate Hurricanes, going 3-for-3 with two doubles and seven runs batted in during a 12-2 win in the first game of a doubleheader.

Down on the farm

Here's a look at how the junior varsity team is doing this season. Highlights courtesy of junior varsity coach Travis Amstutz:

St. Augustine: Johnny Malatesta pitched a good game, leaving with a 7-4 lead in the 5th. Errors and walks led to a 13-7 loss. Charlie Mistretta and Vince Heredia each had two hits.

Ocean City: Ivan Rivera pitched well and we had a 7-1 lead in the 5th. Ocean City, however, rallied for a 13-10 win. Andrew Gee had two hits, including a double.

Atlantic City: Brandon Velez pitched lights out, allowing only two hits for a complete game shutout in a 6-0 win. Malatesta was 2-for-3 with two walks.

Millville: Vineland scored seven runs in the first off of five hits. Justin Rivera picked up the 13-5 win with Vince Heredia in relief. Malatesta, Rivera, and Gee all had three hits and three runs scored.

Oakcrest: The Fighting Clan dominated the Falcons 20-5 with Anthony Sommerville on the mound and Jake Brooks in relief. Malatesta was 4-5 with five RBIs. Rivera, Mistretta, and Cameron Lopez all had three hits with Lopez scoring four runs. Malatesta and Jimmy Hague both had bases-clearing doubles.

Egg Harbor Township: Malatesta gave up three hits in a row in the first inning, but didn't give up any more the rest of the game for a 9-1 win. Mike Forte had a multi-hit game.

Lower Cape May: It was a lopsided, 16-4 victory behind another dominating 3-hit, 2-walk, 5-inning, complete game performance by Velez.

St. Augustine Prep: Vineland gave up six runs on five errors in the second inning to spot the Hermits an 8-0 lead. The Clan battled back in the sixth on consecutive hits by Forte, Raekwon Ortiz, and Mistretta to make it 8-4. Vineland challenged again in the seventh on a 2-run double by Malatesta, but couldn't scrape across another run and lost 8-7.



Who's hot

Vaughn Watson (Sr., 2B): Watson has been on fire lately, raising his average to .333. He also had two hits Monday against St. Augustine's top pitcher, Matt Rakus, one of the top pitchers in the CAL. Watson leads the team with 14 runs scored and also has two doubles and a .500 on-base percentage.

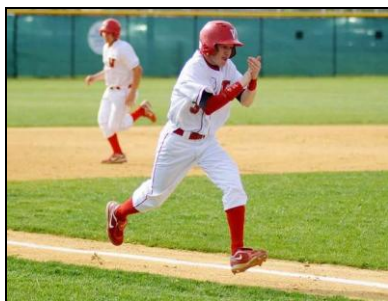
Chris Lopez (Jr., RF): Lopez has been getting on base nearly every game, leading the team with a .462 average that includes seven runs and a .529 on-base average. He also had a pair of hits against the Prep's Rakus.

Andrew Schwegel (Sr., 1B): The burly first-sacker has raised his average to .292 and last week blasted a towering grand slam in a win over Egg Harbor Township. He finished that game with five RBIs and has nine for the season.

Elijah Carter (Jr., P/SS): Carter has been getting it done on the mound and at the plate. He's batting .344 with 11 hits and eight RBIs, and also pitched an outstanding game against Millville in a tough 7-6 loss. He doesn't have a win yet but has allowed just 16 hits and eight earned runs in 13 innings.

"I'm convinced that every boy, in his heart, would rather steal second base than an automobile."

-Tom Clark



"People ask me what I do in winter when there's no baseball. I stare out the window and wait for spring."

-Rogers Hornsby

5Q: Five questions for Chris Lopez

1. What's the best thing about playing baseball at Vineland High?

I feel the best thing about playing baseball at Vineland High School is the diversity of players you get to play with. We have a lot of different backgrounds on this team, and everyone brings something different to the table.

2. Better nickname: Chris "Reds" Lopez, Mordecai "Three Fingers" Brown, or Joe "Ducky" Medwick?

That's a tough one. I'm gonna have to go with my nickname. I feel it's the best because it's short and sweet, and right to the point.

3. Who is the hottest female athlete of 2011?

I have to go with the tennis player Maria Sharapova. I'd play tennis with her anytime.

4. What class do you dread doing homework for?

Math! I was good at math, until they started putting letters in it.

5. You recently got your driver's license. What's the dream car of a 17-year-old guy?

Ferrari F 430 Spider. I dream big.

5Q: Five questions for Tommy Rodriguez

1. What's the worst part about catching?

The worst part of catching is having to catch for a pitcher who just can't find the strike zone.

2. If you were in the MLB Fan Cave, who would you want with you and why?

If I had the chance, I'd want Joe Mauer with me. He could teach me a thing or two about catching.

3. What is your favorite sports movie?

Major League

4. What do you want classmates to remember about you when you meet up with them at your 20th high school reunion?

I want to be remembered as the guy who you always had a good time with.

5. On the trip to Florida, who ate the most at Golden Corral?

Ivan Rivera. He loved the fried chicken!



“Trying to sneak a fastball by Hank Aaron is like trying to sneak a sunrise past a rooster.”

-Joe Adcock

On deck:

WEDNESDAY, MAY 4 VS. OCEAN CITY, 4 PM

A win over the Red Raiders would be huge with the cutoff for the state playoffs coming up on May 13.

FRIDAY, MAY 6 VS. MAINLAND, 4 PM

The second game of a 5-game homestand against the struggling Mustangs.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 11 VS. ATLANTIC, 4 PM

The Clan had to rally against a scrappy Vikings squad in the first meeting, taking home a 6-3 victory.

Hitting when it counts

Ever notice how some teams who play close games end up winning those games in the late innings at the plate? Here are a few tips to keep in mind on how to win the battle at the plate late.

1. The pitcher has to pitch to the batter.

He is the one who needs to throw strikes, and that is where the battle begins. Pitchers want to throw strikes early late in the game and get ahead of the hitter. Great hitters like Ted Williams and Tony Gwynn looked for strikes they could hit early. On average, hitters tend to have a better chance of getting a hit early in the count. So tell your hitters to be ready early.

2. Make the pitcher throw strikes.

Now that your hitter is looking for a strike early, the batter also needs to show some patience. A pitcher may make a good pitch on his first or second throw and that is okay. The batter still needs to look for pitches in his zone and strive to drive those pitches.

3. Keep the swings under control.

Hitters tend to want to be heroes and forget about the fundamentals late in the game. Remind your hitters that hitting the ball in the gaps, using the whole field, and striving to hit under control is the best way to increase your chances of winning the ballgame. Swinging out of control, pulling the ball, and not going up to the plate with a good approach decreases the batter's chances of getting on base, and thus hurts the team.

4. Be observant.

With the pressure on, pitchers tend to throw the same pitch over and over again in the same situation. Observant hitters will pick up on this and be able to use it to their advantage. Any edge you can get at the plate can help you succeed in the task at hand.

And above all, the most important thing to remember at the plate is the three C's: confidence, control, and composure.

--**Jim Kosmerick** is the manager for the Pontiac Cubs Baseball Club, a semi-pro team based in Pontiac, Michigan. He has been coaching at the semi-pro level for the past 10 years with teams based in Pontiac and Battle Creek, Michigan. Coach Kosmerick's teams have won numerous titles and he has helped guide many college players on to the minor and major leagues.



“I’ve come to the conclusion that the two most important things in life are good friends and a good bullpen.”

-Bob Lemon
