

Special Interest Articles:

- A college pitcher loses an eye, but not his desire to pitch page 4
- A look at how Vineland baseball players did in the classroom during the third marking period, page 7

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Vineland High School
Baseball – Playoff Drive Issue

Clan make push to state playoffs

VINELAND GOES 4-3 IN ITS FIRST 7 GAMES IN MAY TO EARN BERTH:

Coming off a 6-17 season in 2010, the Vineland coaching staff wasn't sure what to expect in the spring of 2011. However, head coach John Malatesta and his assistants believed they had the foundation for a successful team in place and thought that if things came together the Fighting Clan was capable of double-digit wins and a state playoff berth.

After posting a 6-4 record in April, that level of success seemed well within reach. However, May got off to a rocky start, as Vineland traveled to St. Augustine Prep on May 2 and got hammered 11-1 by one of the best teams in South Jersey. However, one thing Vineland has shown under Malatesta is the ability to bounce back from tough losses.

Vineland did just that, avenging an earlier loss to Ocean City by beating the Red Raiders 5-3 on May 5 then taking care of Mainland 8-6 the following day to improve to 8-5. Senior right-hander Carlos Lebron shut down Ocean City, pitching a complete game 6-hitter in a sign of what was to come later in the month. Senior Vaughn Watson had two hits and Bobby Romano had two RBIs to pace the offense. Chris Lopez was 3-4 with a pair of RBIs in the win over Mainland and Eli Carter and Romano each chipped in two RBIs.

Vineland had a letdown on May 10, falling 7-5 to Egg Harbor Township, which rallied to erase a 4-3 deficit late in the game. Again, the Fighting Clan responded, beating Atlantic City the next day in dramatic fashion as Romano launched a 3-run; walk off home run to right-center field as Vineland beat the Vikings 8-7.

An 8-3 loss to rival Millville on May 13 was followed up last Monday with a crisp 4-2 victory over Oakcrest. Lebron turned in perhaps the best performance of his career on the mound, limiting the Falcons to just three hits while tossing 106 pitches in earning the complete game victory, his fourth of the year.

With a 10-7 record through May 19, Vineland earned a state playoff berth and will travel to face a traditionally powerful Cherokee team on Monday, May 23 in the opening round.



"Baseball was my whole life. Nothing's ever been as fun as baseball."

Mickey Mantle

News and notes

AWARD WINNERS:

Two Vineland seniors recently were honored at the Diamond Classic Tournament and Scholar-Athlete/Unsung Hero Awards Luncheon at Masso's Crystal Manor in Glassboro. Second baseman Vaughn Watson was selected as the team's unsung hero and center fielder Bobby Romano was honored as a scholar-athlete. Watson is batting .281 and leads the team with 18 runs and is second in hits with 16. Romano is hitting .264 with a home run, five doubles, 15 runs and 14 RBIs. He also carries a grade-point average of 4.75 and will be attending Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania this fall...Former Vineland star Darren Ford currently is in the major leagues with the San Francisco Giants. Ford was called up in mid-April to replace outfielder Andres Torres, who went on the disabled list. However, he remained with the big club even after Torres came off the DL, as the Giants opted to send a pair of infielders back down to triple-A. In 16 games, Ford has had nine at-bats and has two hits, a stolen base and five runs, one of which was a game-winner. Ford was drafted in the 18th round by the Milwaukee Brewers in 2004 and made his major-league debut last September, scoring the game-winning run in his first appearance as a pinch-runner. Ford has 688 hits in seven minor-league seasons and is a career .268 hitter in the minors with 295 stolen bases.

Who's hot

LEBRON A DUAL THREAT:

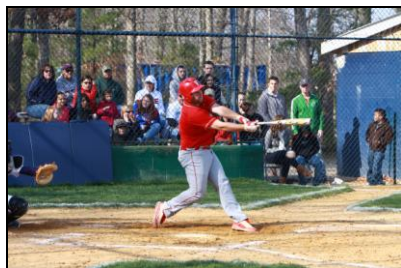
Sensing the end of his high school baseball career, Carlos Lebron has really come on. He pitched a complete game 6-hitter in a rematch against Ocean City in early May, as the Fighting Clan avenged an early season loss with a 5-3 victory. He also had a hit and an RBI in that game. In his latest outing, Lebron dominated Oakcrest, allowing just three hits and two runs while tossing another complete game. He also had two hits, including an RBI double. For the season, Lebron is hitting .373 with a home run and 12 RBIs, and is 4-1 with a 2.95 ERA and a save on the mound.

ROWAN HEATING UP:

Mark Rowan got off to a slow start, but has been swinging the bat well lately. He had 2-hit games against Egg Harbor Township and Oakcrest and has raised his average to .324. He has 11 hits, seven runs scored, two doubles, two home runs and seven RBIs.

ROMANO'S BIG BLAST:

Bobby Romano picked a great time for a power surge. Trailing Atlantic City 7-5 in the bottom of the seventh, Romano cranked a 3-run walkoff home run to deep right-center. He's also hit in four straight games to raise his average to .264 after a slow start.



Q & A: senior Carlos Lebron

Question: Your high school baseball career is coming to a close. What will you remember most about it after graduation?

Answer: How the team stuck together. Whether we won or lost, we all supported one another.

Q: This past week you turned in a dominating performance on the mound against Oakcrest, battling a sore lower back to strike out nine in a 4-2 win. Where did the motivation come from for that type of effort?

A: I would have to say my mom's pep talk in the morning about how these are my last games for high school, so give it my all.

Q: In your junior year the team won just six games. This year Vineland has won 10 games so far and earned a spot in the state playoffs. What do you think was the key to the turnaround?

A: The way the team and coaches bonded and the seniors showed leadership.

Q: What have you learned about yourself as you have become one of the leaders of the team over the last two seasons?

A: There is always room for improvement and you learn something new from every game.

Q: Your parents, Sam and Jeannie, seem to be big supporters of your athletic career. How important is it to have them rooting for you?

A: I am very lucky and blessed to have my parents support. It's very important to me. I would not be who I am today without them supporting me.

Q: What has been the highlight of your high school baseball career?

A: Hitting my first home run off of (Millville's) Chet Godfrey. My first little league home run was off of Chet as well.

Q: What do you think the future holds for Vineland baseball?

A: I can only see bigger and better things happening with all the great talent coming up.

Q: When you're listening to your iPod, what song really gets you pumped up before you go out to pitch?

A: I don't have a certain song, but a certain verse: psalms 34:8, which says "taste and see that the lord is good, blessed is the man who takes refuge in him."

Q: It seems like the team has really come together, not only as players, but as friends. Where do you think that type of "chemistry" comes from?

A: It starts with the coaches and their leadership.

Q: If you were an actor in a movie, would you want to be the hero, or the villain? Explain your answer.

A: The hero, of course. I want people to remember me in a positive way.

Q: What do you think the coolest reality show to be on would be?

A: I don't watch those shows. I only watch sports.

Q: If you were on the old television show "The Dating Game" and competing with two other guys for a date with a pretty girl, what would you say when she asked you "and why should i go out with Carlos?"

A: Just look at me baby...

Q: You've gotten to know coach Malatesta over the last two years. What do you think of his coaching style?

A: It's good. It's working because it's strict discipline, but that is effective.

Q: What do you think of Andrew Schwegel's home run trot? Is yours cooler?

A: Of course, because I have swag.

Q: Which Major League team has the coolest "throwback" uniforms?

A: The Phillies

Q: If life works out how you planned, where will you be in 10 years and what will you be doing?

A: I will have my bachelor's degree in criminal justice and be working as a New Jersey state trooper.



"I'd walk through hell in a gasoline suit to play baseball."

-Pete Rose

"Baseball, it is said, is only a game. True. And the Grand Canyon is only a hole in Arizona. Not all holes, or games, are created equal."

-George Will

Pitcher loses eye, but not focus



By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

Jordan Underwood's life shifted in the instant the line drive smashed into his left eye. "Your first thought was, 'Is he alive?'" said Ky Burgess, Underwood's catcher that day. "He was not moving. He didn't make a noise. All you heard was the sound of the ball hitting the bat, the ball hitting his face and the ball trickling off."

Though the Seminole State College pitcher was alive, doctors couldn't save his eye. That devastating loss didn't deter Underwood's passion for baseball and his drive to compete again.

Two years later, he is Southeast Missouri State's ace and one of the top pitchers in the Ohio Valley Conference. In late April, the senior left-hander from Edmond, Okla., was 3-0 with a 4.03 ERA for the first-place Redhawks.

"I still had the urge to go back and give it a shot," Underwood said. "But I didn't think things would work out as well as they have for me."

That the soft-spoken Underwood is pitching in Division I stems from his perseverance and a surprising scholarship offer from Southeast Missouri State coach Mark Hogan only two months after Underwood was injured.

"I was so impressed when I met him," Hogan said. "I told him, 'Jordan, I don't know what's going to happen here, and you don't either. But I like you, your desire to get back on the field is real, and I'd like to be a part of it.'"

"At the time it was less about baseball and more about this guy's desire to pursue his dream. To go where it has gone is off the chart."

Underwood would be finished with baseball had the ball struck his right eye. As a lefty, he wouldn't have been able to see the plate when working from the stretch.

Doctors put no limitations on Underwood, telling him they were confident his brain would rewire itself to make up for the loss of the eye.

Some thought depth perception would be an issue for a pitcher, but it's not. Doctors told him two eyes are needed to discern depth inside 20 feet. Beyond that — say 60 feet, 6 inches, the distance from the mound to home plate — a person can manage with one eye.

Underwood was fitted with a prosthetic left eye and he wears glasses with polycarbonate lenses, the NCAA requiring the protective eyewear as part of the liability waiver that allows Underwood to compete.

He throws an 84 mph fastball and mixes in a curve, slider and changeup.

He held Tennessee-Martin to two runs on five hits in 6 2/3 innings of an 8-2 win on April 16.

Before the injury, schools such as Central Florida, Louisville and Pittsburgh were trying to recruit him out of Seminole State.

The calls stopped after that April afternoon in 2009 when Northeastern Oklahoma A&M's cleanup hitter drilled Underwood's first-pitch fastball right back at his face.

"My eyeball got squished," Underwood said.

He started playing catch after getting back on his feet. The first few times, someone would stand next to him and catch the ball as it came back, like a quarterback warming up on the sideline. He wanted to pitch again, but only had an offer from Division II Central Oklahoma.

Burgess, his best friend, had signed with Southeast Missouri State. He called Rick McCarty, the pitching coach at the time, to tell him about his buddy. McCarty tipped Hogan and he spoke with Seminole State coach Jeff Shafer, who gave Underwood a strong recommendation.

"The \$64,000 question was whether he would be able to overcome everything he had to address," Hogan said. "I was willing to take the chance because after I met the guy I couldn't turn him down."

Underwood said he "lucked out."

"Not everybody comes back from things like this," Tennessee-Martin's Cates said. "We write books or make movies about the people who do."

*"Poets are like
baseball pitchers.
Both have their
moments. The
intervals are the
tough things."*

-Robert Frost

Down on the farm

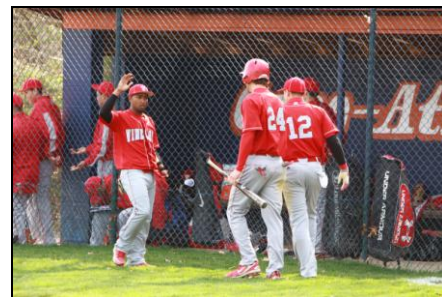
The junior varsity team has been enjoying a very successful 2011 campaign. In a recent game against Atlantic City, Anthony Somerville faced only 17 batters and the team quickly dispatched the Vikings 10-0 in 5 innings.

Millville was another mercy-rule win as the Clan rolled 15-4. Johnny Malatesta got it done on the mound, striking out six, and at the plate, going 3-for-3 with a triple. Andrew Gee and Jake Brooks each went 3-for-3.

In the opening game of the Oakcrest Tournament, the Fighting Clan beat a previously unchallenged and undefeated Holy Spirit team, 5-4. Brandon Velez pitched 6 1/3 strong innings, recording six strikeouts. "Web Gem" worthy plays were made by Cameron Lopez, Randall Maldonado and Mike Forte. Brooks was the man at the plate, going 3-for-3 with a triple. Raekwon Ortiz also had a clutch pinch-hit RBI single in the 6th inning. Justin Rivera came on in the 7th with one out and runners on 1st and 2nd. He got a strikeout and a grounder to Forte at third to save the game.

In the championship game, the team stayed hot at the plate and put across 4 runs in the first inning. The team dominated from the start and cruised to a 15-8 win, and the trophy, in the inaugural tournament. Showing his DH skills, Ortiz went 4-5 win 3 RBIs and Gee added a 3-for-5 effort with a triple. Brooks pitched the team to the win with six strikeouts and Justin Rivera made another relief appearance in the seventh to finish the game.

Oakcrest visited Vineland again two days after the tourney and got the same result getting, 10-run in 6 innings, 14-4. Somerville was dealing again with the magic number of 6 Ks. Lopez made a deja-vu diving play at second base. Velez lead the offense, going 3-for-3 with a double and a walk. Brooks was 2-for-4 with 6 RBIs and Charlie Mistretta added a triple.



Junior varsity statistical leaders

BATTING

(Minimum 20 at-bats) Batting average: Raekwon Ortiz .500, Johnny Malatesta .435, Justin Rivera .382, Jesse Edelstein .367, Charles Mistretta .354. Doubles: Malatesta 4, Edelstein 4, Ortiz 3, Andrew Gee 3. Runs: Malatesta 25, Edelstein 18, Mistretta 18, Mike Forte 14, Ortiz 14. Walks: Edelstein 12, Gee 11, Malatesta 11, Rivera 9, Mistretta 8. RBIs: Malatesta 22, Mistretta 19, Ortiz 17, Edelstein 13, Rivera 12.

PITCHING

Strikeouts: Malatesta 31, Brandon Velez 23, Anthony Somerville 17. ERA: Velez 1.50, Somerville 2.24, Malatesta 3.14, Jacob Brooks 3.99

"The strongest thing baseball has going for it today are its yesterdays."

-Lawrence Ritter



5Q: Five questions for Jeff Rowan

1. *How tough has it been transitioning to the catching position?*

It has actually been really hard. I have had little catching experience. Now that I'm catching, I'm a part of the play every time and I have to pay the most attention. It also makes you think so much more and plan your game. It is definitely the most physical position on the field. You have to be very tough to be a good varsity catcher.

2. *You have a twin brother, Mark. Which one of you gets preferential treatment from your parents?*

Honestly, Mark does. I think my parents feel bad for him because he was born second, therefore making him the lesser person. When he is not around though, I get to feel how it is to be a single child. And it is pretty darn good.

3. *What's the worst thing about having a twin?*

The worst thing is split between sharing everything and people getting our names mixed up. We both have to share everything! There are not many things I can call "mine." When people get my name wrong though, it is alright, but gets kind of annoying after the 30th time every day.

4. *Backstage pass at any concert. Which band would you most like to hang out with after the show?*

Probably Metallica. I've always liked their music and they are the only band I've gone to a concert for. I play their music to get pumped up before games and hanging out with them would be fun.

5. *Who looks better in red and gray, you or Mark?*

I definitely do. Mark doesn't look good in anything, according to girls. Yeah, I went there.

"More than any other sport, baseball creates the magnetic, addictive illusion that it can almost be understood."

-Thomas Boswell

5Q: Five questions for Mark Rowan

1. *You wear No. 4 and Jeff wears No. 8. Does he constantly tell you that you're half the ballplayer he is?*

I kind of had to take the number 4. My real number is 32, so that makes me four times the ballplayer he is!

2. *Dream golf course. Where are you playing and who is riding in the cart with you?*

Augusta National. My dad, because he has played for a long time and that would be special for him.

3. *When Jeff got hit with a ball and got a black eye, were you telling classmates "That's what happens when you mess with Mark Rowan"?*

Yup. I told everyone that he wouldn't stop talking trash, so I solved that problem.

4. *You're a big golf buff. Is it really necessary for golfers to wear cleats?*

If you drive 300-plus yards and create a lot of torque with your legs then they will help you not slip. I wear cleats.

5. *If you were on American Idol, what song would you sing in the championship round?*

I would probably sing "Barbie Girl."



“The best way to catch a knuckleball is to wait until the ball stops rolling and then pick it up.”

-Bob Uecker

On deck:

MONDAY, MAY 23 AT CHEROKEE, 4 PM

The Fighting Clan travel to Marlton to take on No. 7 Cherokee in the first round of the South Jersey Group IV playoffs. Vineland drew the No. 10 seed, and this is the first playoff appearance under second-year coach John Malatesta. Other area matchups include (13) Oakcrest at (4) Eastern, (11) Winslow Township at (6) Absegami, and (15) Toms River East at (2) Millville.

TUESDAY, MAY 24 AT LOWER CAPE MAY, 4 PM

The Caper Tigers will be looking for revenge as Vineland won the first meeting 10-3.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25 AT HAMMONTON, 4PM

The Clan recorded a rain shorted 5 – 0 shut out victory at home in there previous meeting this season.

THURSDAY, MAY 26 AT SACRED HEART, 4 PM

Another chapter in the Inter-City rivalry.

Third marking period grades

The Vineland baseball team has been getting the job done in the classroom as well as on the field. Here's how some of the program's players did during the third marking period:

Summa Cum Laude

Bobby Romano, Joseph Galan, Johnny Malatesta, Eric Stratoti

Magna Cum Laude

Chris Lopez, Tyler Martine, Jeff Rowan, Mark Rowan, Austin Padilla

Cum Laude

Carlos Lebron, Josh Stuart, Rickey Hinds, Brandon Velez, Jesse Edelstein, Charles Mistretta, Don Money, Nick English, Andrew Gee, Eddie Gutierrez, Chad Schwegel

Team grade-point average: 3.06

Seniors: 2.97

Juniors: 2.92

Sophomores: 3.38

Freshmen: 2.95

Highest overall GPA: Bobby Romano, 4.75



“Baseball statistics are like a girl in a bikini. They show a lot, but not everything.”

-Toby Harrah