

## **Crush await fate of league's season**

By Sam Feeley

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CORTLAND — The Cortland Crush are waiting with bated breath to see if the 2020 New York Collegiate Baseball League season will be played.

After winning the Eastern Division title in 2019 but falling in the semifinals, the Crush hoped to build on what they accomplished and reverse that disappointing end to the season. They have plenty of elite talent chomping at the bit to play what would be their first live games in several months.

But with the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic, it remains to be seen when those games will be played, if at all.

“There is not a formal timetable [for a decision],” Crush head coach Bill McConnell said. “However, the NYCBL Executive Committee and the league franchises do discuss such a timetable aimed at providing a fulfilling summer season of baseball. Dates have been discussed, but we are monitoring the situation at a federal, state and the local level, plus working with Major League Baseball, who are partial sponsors of the NYCBL.”

McConnell doesn't expect the long layoff to adversely impact the games. All the NYCBL teams communicate weekly with the players and their families, and each team is planning a short preseason training plan if the season gets the green light.

“The message is to stay positive, work out to the best of your ability, watch old games to keep mentally sharp, and let's hope that the summer brings the 'Boys of Baseball' back to the NYCBL,” McConnell said.

Crush catcher and Cortland High alum Noah Barber believes getting back to live action after the hiatus will feel different, but not for long.

“I believe that when the games start back up everything will feel different, but as long as I stay in shape and keep monitoring my swings I will adjust back to live game action quickly,” he said.

The abrupt halt to the collegiate baseball season has impacted Crush players in different ways. Brothers Tommy and Cregg Scherer are “able to long toss together whenever we need to,” according to Tommy. Both are Skaneateles natives.

Cregg's Albany squad was 7-5 and was en route to a game in Virginia when they were forced to turn back. Cregg, who was an All-NYCBL selection last year and is on the MLB watch list, described the ongoing ordeal as “truly an eye-opening experience” and understands “that things cannot be taken for granted.”

Nick Pastore, a senior at SUNY Brockport, has set up a tee in his backyard and has been working out in his basement. Playing a full season this year is important to him because “I would love to be able to play in the next level and I will do everything in my power to do so.”

It’s easy to see why this season means so much to Pastore — last summer for the Crush he slashed .314/.391/.438 with 22 RBI, 31 steals in 32 attempts and just 16 strikeouts in 137 at-bats.

When and if the season gets underway, the Crush will display plenty of exciting talent in addition to Pastore, the Scherers and Barber. Names to look out for include Holden Lazarus, Even Minarovic and Joel Vaske.

Lazarus, a product of Ithaca High, was projected as a low-round pick in this year’s draft before MLB and the Players’ Union agreed to a four-round draft this summer. He is a Michigan commit.

Minarovic is another Big Ten prospect. The middle infielder from Northwestern started for the Wildcats as a freshman and played well offensively.

Vaske joins the Crush from Kirkwood Community College in Iowa. He is an outfielder and catcher who is transferring to Division I next year and has family roots in professional baseball.