

SPORTS

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Addison resident Geraci fares well at wrestling nationals

Recent Indian Trails graduate places fifth and earns All-American honors

By Mike Miazga
Correspondent

Addison resident Anthony Geraci was slowed by an injury that can only be termed "no fun."

"I had a bruised tailbone," the recent Indian Trails Junior High graduate said. "I could barely walk."

But Geraci battled back from the injury to compete in the

recent USA Wrestling Nationals in Wisconsin Dells, Wis.

Geraci took fifth place at nationals in the Freestyle Schoolboy 144-pound weight class to earn All-American honors.

"Coming back from an injury like that I think I did pretty good," he said. "Coming back I only had one practice, but I was well enough to wrestle in the tournament."

Geraci said some aggressiveness on his part helped in the tournament. "I was pretty good with my upper body," he said. "I took a few shots that really saved me."

Geraci wrestled in four matches at nationals and went 2-2. Both of his wins were by technical fall.

"Some of the best competition in the country was at the tournament," he said.

Geraci has been wrestling for six years. "As a little kid my dad would tell me about how he used to wrestle (at Lake Park High School) and I told him I wanted to be a wrestler," he said. "I like everything about the sport. I like the discipline and the hard work and the overall feeling you get after you win a match."

Geraci said he's been hard

at work recently in the weight room. "My biggest improvement has been my strength," he said. "I work out a lot. I've found this year it's easier to take guys down. Last year I had some problems taking down some guys. Now I can take them down to the mat."

Geraci wrestles for Headlock Wrestling Academy based out of Addison Trail High School. "Headlock has helped me out a lot," he said. "It's made me an all-around better wrestler."

Geraci's dad, Sam, coaches him at Headlock. "He's the best coach I've ever had," Geraci said.

Geraci qualified for nationals by competing at a state tournament in Champaign and a Northern Plains qualifier in Rockford. Geraci took second at the state tournament and third at the Northern Plains event.

Geraci, who enjoys fishing in his spare time, will attend Montini High School in Lombard starting next month. To say the least, he's looking forward to the upcoming high school wrestling season.

"I'm working hard over the summer every day," he said. "I want to be ready to go for the high school wrestling season."

Willowbrook summer baseball team concludes successful season

Warriors down Morton in first round of playoffs

By Mike Miazga
Correspondent

All in all, Willowbrook baseball coach Vic Wisner was pleased with how his team performed in the recently completed summer season.

"We had a good summer," he said.

Willowbrook went 12-6 and advanced to the second round of the state summer playoffs. The Warriors downed Morton 7-0 in the opening round of the playoffs and then lost to Lyons Township in the second round.

Of note in the Morton win, Willowbrook pitcher Cam Zunkel pitched a one-hit shutout and struck out 14 batters.

"Cam had a really good curveball and his fastball was electric that day," said Wisner. "When you have a fastball that moves like his and a curveball that good, it's tough to hit."

Zunkel also had two hits in the win. Kyle Maryniuk also was cited for strong play as was Kyle Ferguson.

"Kyle Martyniuk has been hot all summer," said Wisner. "Kyle Ferguson also helped us with a couple hits. We scratched out some runs here and there and got the win."

Matt Pizur pitched five innings in a 6-5 loss to Lyons Township.

"It was a great game against Lyons," said Wisner.

Willowbrook trailed 2-0 at one point but came back and tied the game at 2-2 heading into the seventh inning. Zunkel and Ferguson helped lead the comeback with timely hits, Wisner said.

However, Lyons scored four runs in the seventh to go up 6-2. But Willowbrook wasn't done with its comeback.

"We had the bases loaded with one out in the seventh," Wisner explained. "We hit a short fly ball that their kid caught and threw the runner out at the plate. Their kid had to make a play and he did."

Looking back on the summer season, Wisner especially was pleased with the squad's pitching performance.

"Overall, our pitching was exactly what we thought it would be," he said. "Cam Zunkel, Matt Pizur, Matt Garbacz, Joe Strem and Ronnie Reitz allowed us to go five deep with our starters and all of them threw well for us."

Chris DeSalvo also made an impact. "Chris is coming off three shoulder surgeries," said Wisner. "This is the first summer where he's been healthy. He had an amazing summer hitting the ball and fielding. He played an awesome first base."

Wisner added Zunkel and Martyniuk continued their strong play from the spring season. "Cam and Kyle were hot during the spring and they continued to hit the ball very well to all fields," the coach said. "They did a really nice job."

The summer also allowed Wisner to evaluate new players in the program such as short-stop-pitcher-third baseman MJ Ranieri and third baseman-pitcher Alec Michaelson.

"We got a good chance to see guys play," said Wisner. "MJ and Alec hit the ball well. These are kids who will play somewhere for us."

TJ Geritano also excelled in center field. "TJ is coming back from a knee injury," Wisner pointed out. "He had a great season catching the ball. He can run down balls in center field. He had a great summer for us and it's nice having him back at full speed."

Wisner liked the fact the team continued its winning ways. "We got a good look at everybody and continued to win," he said. "Winning is a habit and these guys expect to win. This summer was crazy. Last year we played 30-something games. This year with the weather we played 18. To accomplish what we did is great."

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Sports and specialization

Offerings keep area athletes busy during offseason

By DAN SANTAROMITA
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It used to be that elite high school athletes had three jerseys in their closets – one for a fall sport, one for a winter sport, and one for a spring sport.

Many high school athletes today still have three jerseys in the closet, though things are slightly different. Increasingly, those jerseys are home and away high school jerseys for one sport and a uniform for a club team in that same sport.

More and more high school athletes are choosing to specialize in one sport with year-round competition aided by a plethora of AAU and club programs.

The downside is fewer well-rounded athletes representing their high schools, but there are plenty of benefits for high school athletes willing to specialize in one sport by playing for clubs and on AAU teams in the offseason.

Options abound

Sports Performance is one of the elite volleyball clubs in the country. Its 18U red and 18U elite teams won AAU national titles in June.

Allison Farrell, Meghan Wozniak and Samantha Silbernagel from Glenbard East all play at Sports Performance. York's Liz Pronove, Sarah Rose and Hannah Fleckenstein, Montini's Monica Loftus, and Timothy Christian's Hanna Markewicz and Kacie Stoll are products of the highly-regarded 1st Alliance Volleyball Club.

It's not just volleyball players who have a plethora of



Steve Bittinger - For Shaw Media

Eric Grygo receives a pass July 11 during an AAU basketball tournament at Bolingbrook High School. Grygo, an Addison Trail senior, played with the Mercury Elite AAU team this summer.

competition options in the offseason and are benefiting from extra coaching.

AAU basketball is busy in the summer with players competing in tournaments across the country with area teams such as Chicago Lockdown, Illinois Wolves and Mercury Elite for boys and Illinois Lady Lightning for girls.

"In the last three years, it's gone from probably three to four teams to where it is now with 19 teams," said founder Dave Ruggles, whose program has players from across the suburbs. "We started with one team and we grew it from there."

Traveling teams also are huge for baseball, softball and soccer players, and the competition just as fierce. Some

soccer players choose to forgo their high school teams and focus solely on club ball, getting high-level instruction and college exposure with clubs such as Eclipse Select and Chicago Fire Juniors.

Baseball and softball players also have a number of options in the offseason.

Top Tier Baseball draws heavily from Chicago and the suburbs but also includes some players from downstate Illinois and northwest Indiana. Similarly, Longshots baseball is based in Downers Grove but draws from a wide area.

The Beverly Bandits, Downers Grove Rebels, Illinois Chill and Lemont Rockers, summer home for several Montini players, are just a few of the many

travel softball programs that feature players from throughout the suburbs.

Benefits and drawbacks

For the athletes, there are obvious benefits to devoting time to a club team in the offseason. Those benefits include more hands-on coaching, time to work and improve on specific skills, and a chance to play against elite competition in front of college coaches.

In baseball, basketball, softball and volleyball, the college and high school seasons run concurrently, which limits the amount of time college coaches can devote to watching prospects in person. There also are NCAA restrictions regarding the amount of contact coaches can have with players at certain times, restrictions that are lessened during the summer, and since college coaches aren't busy coaching their teams they are able to flock to the large tournaments and watch hundreds of the best players from across the country compete.

"High school volleyball is not where the scholarships come from," said Sue Keck, director and founder of 1st Alliance. "You pretty much have to play club to get that scholarship."

In the short term, a strong showing in a tournament in front of college coaches is a great way to gain notoriety and can lead to a next-level opportunity. Even if a scholarship doesn't come at the end of the summer, playing against elite competition in the offseason is a great way to improve.

"I always encourage our guys to play as much as they can. If they find a program that has a good mix of playing and teaching, I'm all for that," Addison Trail boys basketball coach Brendan Lyons said. "Any opportunity to play is a good thing."

The invite-only Beverly Bandits team is an extreme example of a travel team. In addition to players from southern suburban Chicago and northwest Indiana, the Bandits have players who hail from Indianapolis, northern Wisconsin, Virginia and West Virginia. With so many far-flung players, practice during the summer is nearly nonexistent.

Not all high-level teams have a summer practice time.

The Mercury Elite hockey team practices two or three times a week, which aids in skill development and team development. Longshots baseball works on position-specific skills during fall practices and has a winter program three days per week.

Both sides of the line?

There are plenty of options available for high school athletes looking to stay competitive in their sports in between high school seasons, each offering a little something different.

Some programs focus on playing in highly-competitive tournaments with the thought being the competition will make players better, while other programs balance skill development and live competition. There is something to be gained from staying sharp in the offseason and playing on the side of high school, and there are some tangible benefits in the form of college opportunities, but that's for each athlete to decide.

"If you want to test yourself against the kind of competition you see at the AAU level, it's going to give you an edge as a player," said Jim Thomas, boys varsity basketball coach at Downers Grove North and a 17U coach with Mercury Elite. "But I don't tell the kids at Downers Grove they have to play."

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