

Summer Leagues Boost Skills, Open Doors

By Garrett Ley



Junior Andrew Kjar

Photo Jordan Fong

For most high school baseball players, the conclusion of the spring sports season in May marks the end of practices, games and team gatherings until next February when it all starts up again. Generally speaking, the players have had enough. They're tired of batting practice, their arms are sore, and they are ready to move on to better things.

That's not the case for the slew of players who look to accelerate their game to the next level and get a step ahead of the competition during the summer. Summer baseball teams ranging from Central California to Sacramento boast players who dedicate their summers to playing baseball. These players, like Miramonte second baseman Joey Epperson, put the poolside barbecues on hold and head out onto the baseball diamond every day in the summer to showcase their skill and better prepare themselves for next spring.

"We're playing all the time," says Epperson. "We probably play 60 games over the summer, and maybe more depending on how we do in tournaments. A likely schedule is four games during the week, and then double headers on the weekend."

Epperson's team, the Head First Gamers from Castro Valley, is coached by several former big-league players such as Mario and Michael Inglesias, and Caleb Cooper.

"Every game you feel yourself getting better because of all the great instruction," says Epperson, who was a first-team all-DFAL selection last spring.

Epperson wrapped up his junior year at Miramonte in which he hit .462 with 12 doubles, four triples, a home run, 14 stolen bases and 30 RBI. He took the Matadors into the second round of the NCS playoffs, and then was flooded with letters and phone calls from coaches at Stanford and Santa Barbara, among other top baseball schools.

Scouting is a big part of summer baseball, according to Epperson, as college scouts look for the top talent.

"Signing period is usually the end of summer, so how you play over the summer matters," Epperson says. "Coaches and scouts will still come to watch high school games, but summer is a better time for them. During the big summer tournaments, all the big-time players are in the same place, so it's an opportunity for scouts to see all the talent at once."

A few days ago, Epperson got a call from a Kansas City Royals scout. Yes, the Kansas City Royals of Major League Baseball. Epperson has his hard work and dedication that he has put into summer baseball to thank for his success.

"Working at it every day—whether it's playing in games, going to Game Speed, or taking batting practice—you're going to improve. It makes a big, big difference," Epperson said.

Epperson is not the only player from Miramonte playing in a summer league. Juniors Mike Reuecamp, Andrew Kjar and Matt Lloyd play for the Danville Hoots; Tommy Miers and Kevin Paulsen play for the Danville Black Sox; and John Vaccaro is on the Nor-Cal team. Of those players, Reuecamp, Kjar, Lloyd and Vaccaro earned all-league honors.

Campolindo players Anthony Fadelli, Jeff Gold, Matt Robinson, Scott Hogland, Guy Stevens and Michael Kathan each participate in summer leagues. Acalanes players Max Weintraub, Michael Avery, Daniel Camporeli and Jack Carson also play into the summer.

"I would say summer baseball makes a big difference in preparing for the high school season," Epperson says. "You have more game-time experience and are more skilled."

While some players have trouble dealing with the time commitment associated with summer baseball, Epperson has found it enjoyable and rewarding.

"The best part is being able to play all the time," he says. "You feel yourself getting better everyday. A lot of your friends are doing it, so you run into them once in a while. The chances to play are unlimited."