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## Acalanes Baseball's Video-Analysis System a Home Run

By Spencer Silva



Photo Gint Federas

After several years of offensive output seemingly incommensurate with their talent, Acalanes Dons' head coach Justin Santich-Hughes, and others, decided to look for answers.

"We always thought our offense could be better, so we wanted to invest in some tools," he explained.

Two years ago, they found a tool in RightViewPro, a video-tracking system developed by former major leaguer Don Slaught.

With the help of the Lafayette A's – a local non-profit that helps fundraise for local baseball projects – and Acalanes parents, the program was able to raise enough money to purchase cameras, a radar gun and the accompanying computer software.

At the professional and collegiate ranks, teams have long used advances in technology and data gathering to effect change in box scores. Now, it seems, the "Moneyball" ethos made famous by the Oakland Athletics is trickling all the way down to high school.

The Acalanes baseball field now features three cameras that record every single play from both first and third base sides, as well as from behind home plate. Last year, during the system's inaugural season, video from games was primarily used to aid hitting coach Clint Hoover, who played for both Cal and the Houston Astros, in tweaking players' swings.

The system also allows coaches to juxtapose players' swings with those of current major leaguers. If players use a leg kick, for instance, they can compare themselves to Blue Jays' third baseman Josh Donaldson; or, if a player has a minimal stride, they may decide Angels' first baseman Albert Pujols is a better model.

"Every single major leaguer has the same things in their swing. Why wouldn't we try to get our guys there if we can?" Santich-Hughes asked.

The results thus far have been eye opening. Despite graduating many of their key players, the Dons raised their team batting average some 45 points and won the DFAL crown in 2015. Santich-Hughes estimates the team average is up another 40-or-so points this season.

"We just started using the system to its

full capabilities," Santich-Hughes said.

In order to track more data – to develop scouting reports on opposing pitchers and hitters, position defensive shifts, and even learn coach and umpire tendencies – the team hired two Acalanes students, senior Matt Self and sophomore Tyler Sverak to log play-by-play data into the system's proprietary software. The RightView Pro also came with a Stalker II radar gun – the preferred model of major league scouts – to track pitch velocity.

Self became interested in sports analytics after using the Hudl – video analysis software for football – during his tenure on the school's football team. He has a background in technology and is considering pursuing the intersection between sports and technology as a career.

"The pitchers always want to see the radar-gun readings," Self said.

Santich-Hughes believes that his career, which ended after four years at San Jose State as a catcher, could have been different with the type of technology his kids have.

"I had really good coaching and I was never taught this stuff. I'm convinced I'd be playing in the major leagues if I could hit! Maybe that's a stretch, but that's the kind of impact this stuff has," he declared.

Another benefit to the technology is it allows the team to send colleges accurate data on potential recruits, a luxury most high schools don't have.

Last week the Dons (9-1 overall, 2-0 DFAL) started DFAL play with comfortable victories over both Dougherty Valley and Campolindo. They're averaging a robust 6.6 runs-scored per game and appear to be the team to beat in the DFAL.

Santich-Hughes admits he's been fielding more questions about the system recently.



Grant Young

Photo Gint Federas

## St. Mary's Baseball Finding Early-Season Rhythm

By Dean Boerner



Corbin Burnes

Photo Tod Fierner

Despite graduating star slugger Collin Ferguson, St. Mary's baseball returns most of the talented nucleus that led the Gaels to their first winning season in six years. Last season, the Gaels finished 28-27 – a substantial improvement on the 16-39 record of the season before – and now, at 15-10, many in the program are excited about the upward, winning trend.

"Last year was a big year for us," said junior catcher Nate Nolan. "We had a lot of guys from that team return this year, so having that taste of success was good and showed a lot of guys what we were capable of."

Head coach Eric Valenzuela is confident that his team will build off of its improvement from a year ago. "I like that attitude of our guys," said Valenzuela. "As long as we have energy and enthusiasm, we're going to be okay."

Early on, the Gaels don't appear to have any glaring weakness. The Gaels' Friday starter, junior Corbin Burnes – a West Coast Conference Preseason Pitcher of the Year selection – leads the pitching staff. Burnes followed a solid sophomore campaign with a dominant summer in the Cape Cod League. The tall right-handed hurler touches 94 mph with his fastball, and is expected to go in the first few rounds of the Major League Baseball Draft this June.

The team's Saturday and Sunday starters are also juniors: Johnny York and Cameron Neff. York won seven games last season, a

team high, while Neff posted a 2.23 ERA in five starts.

Another area of improvement is the bullpen, a major liability in previous seasons. This spring, the Gaels' relief corps is a mix of both experience and youth. Nathan Simmons and David Dellaserra are the staff's elder statesmen – it's only seniors – while newcomers Bryce Reichmann, a junior transfer, and freshmen Ty Madrigal and Jonathan Buckley round out the pen.

"Our greatest strength, as opposed to other years, is that this year we have a lot more depth in the bullpen and offensively," Burnes said.

Valenzuela points to his pitching staff's command as a crucial factor in their success. "We have to throw strikes," he explained. "We give up some hits, but it's better than walking guys and giving up free bases."

On offense, the Gaels return several key contributors. Sophomore Zach Kirtley, Nolan, and seniors Anthony Villa and Anthony Gonsolin, headline a balanced lineup. Kirtley – who batted .346 as a freshman and earned Louisville Slugger Freshman All-American honors – is locked in as the team's leadoff hitter, Nolan and Villa anchor the middle of the lineup with their right-handed power bats, while Gonsolin provides both extra-base power and base-stealing acumen.

Just over a month into the season, Saint Mary's holds a 6-3 record in conference. Nolan has already launched five home runs – including a walk-off blast against rival Gonzaga on March 25. Kirtley is once again hitting for a superbly high average, but he's also added a power element to his game, matching Nolan's homerun total of five. Eddie Haus, a redshirt freshman, has also hit well. He burst onto the scene this summer after winning the Hampton's League MVP.

"It seems like we have new guys who step up every day," Nolan expressed.

Even with the early success, Valenzuela stresses improvement. "Executing from an offensive standpoint is something we have to keep improving on," Valenzuela said.

On the mound, Corbin Burnes has met, and maybe even surpassed, expectations. Burnes has four wins and ERA below 2.00. Johnny York has also pitched well, and the Gaels bullpen continues to be productive, especially southpaw Bryce Reichmann.

The Gaels seem to have the pieces to compete for a WCC championship for the first time in years. "I think we have a very special team this year," Burnes said. "By sticking to the process, I think this team can do something that no other Saint Mary's baseball team has done before."

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