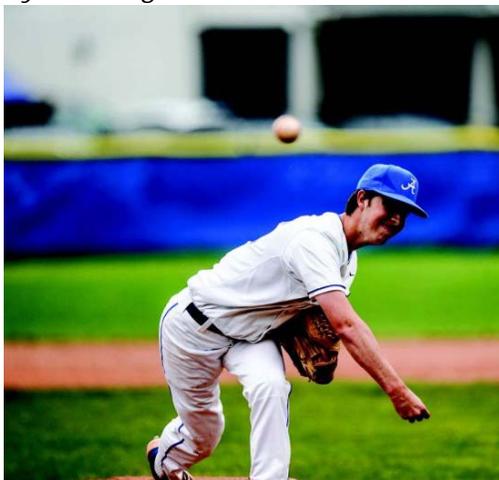


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Acalanes closes season with second round loss to Heritage

By Jon Kingdon



Eddie Burns Photo Gint Federas

As the last team representing a Lamorinda school in any of the spring playoffs, Acalanes brought a 23-2 record (12-0 in league play). The Division III Dons, playing against Division I level teams in the NCS playoffs, defeated Dublin 1-0 in extra innings, but came up short against Heritage (Brentwood) by a score of 5-1. As former major league baseball player, Tug McGraw said about baseball: "Some days you tame the tiger and some days the tiger has you for lunch."

Starting pitcher Logan Hurd battled out of a bases loaded situation in the first and was behind 1-0 when he was relieved in the third inning by Eddie Burns, who did not give up any further runs in the next two and one-third innings. A triple by Cole Murgia brought home Davis Diaz to tie the score in the fifth inning, but Heritage then scored a run in the sixth and three in the seventh inning to close out the scoring.

Little things did not go the Don's way. Diaz led off the game with a walk and was picked off on a move that

could have been called a balk and Nick Kresnak hit two bullets that could have scored runs had they not been hit directly at the left fielder and third baseman.

Acalanes head coach Clint Hoover summed it up: "It was just not right for us at the beginning. We did tie up the game but they took it away from us at the end."

Still it was a memorable turnaround season for Acalanes in Hoover's first season as the team's head coach. From 2018 to 2019, the team's overall batting average went from .255 to .311, the OPS (on base plus slugging percentage) went from .681 to .820.

Murgia's batting average went from .071 to .368, Nicholas Bamont went from .167 to .324, Tommy Thrasher went from .140 to .319 and Scott Brydon went from .143 to .312. Diaz finished the season with an average of .367 and Kresnak batted .366 after batting .355 and .375 in 2018 respectively.

The pitching staff showed a similar turnaround. In 2018, the team's ERA was 3.02 and this year it was 1.12. Eddie Burns, who had a 4-0 record, saw his ERA drop from 3.77 to 0.97. Logan Hurd led the team with an 8-1 record and Kresnak's record was 6-2.

Hoover saw the potential in the team prior to his arrival: "I had coached a number of the players prior to my arrival. I knew we had talent. I just asked them to expect more of themselves and let them believe that they could play and beat anyone on the field, being confident in themselves. We tried to get better every day, and did not overlook anything."

Kresnak credited Hoover and the maturity of the team for its improvement: "Coach Hoover brought a lot to the table. He is a great hitting coach. He tweaked a lot of stuff in our swings and that helped a lot. We had a lot of young players last year and after we saw varsity pitching for a full year, we just applied the adjustments and became better hitters off that."

Batting coach Joe Bettencourt did not coach the players one way: "We let them be themselves and they bought into that well. We worked with them individually with their specific needs and not as a group. We looked to cut down on their swings as much as possible, making it conducive to be more consistent at the plate. They were like sponges and really soaked it up. They have a lot of confidence in themselves and they get all the credit."

Hoover made the players approach batting more mentally: "A lot of the improvement is in their approach to batting - what are they thinking at the plate and what pitch are they looking for in certain situations - the approach with two strikes as opposed to the first pitch at bat. Having that plan when they get to the plate was big for them."

Hoover and Bettencourt gave much of the credit for the improvement on the mound to pitching coach Rob Ellis, who Bettencourt said "did a wonderful job with our pitchers and made sure that they were structured and they came along very well." Hoover concurred that "Rob did a great job and that Hurd stepped up from

playing JV last year and everything just clicked for him and gave us four starters in the rotation."

Acalanes will only be graduating one starter (Scott Brydon) and one pitcher (Burns), so Hoover comes away from the season with a lot of optimism: "It was a great season. I'm really proud of these guys and most of them will be back next year."



Logan Hurd Photo Gint Federas



Cole Murgia Photo Gint Federas



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