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### Dakota baseball returns core from record-setting 2008

By Brad D. Bates  
C & G Sports Writer

The Macomb Dakota baseball team, which last season advanced to the program's first state quarterfinal, bid farewell to five talented seniors at season's end.

But a core of seven seniors is hoping to pick up the slack and keep the program heading in the right direction.

Leading the offense is a trio of seniors — Mike Romanchik (catcher), Jake Hathaway (first baseman) and outfielder Adam Mazza — with multiple years of varsity experience.

Mazza led the team in plate appearances a year ago with 127, and his .362 average was fourth best on the team for players with 60 or more plate appearances. He was also second in runs scored with 30.

Hathaway's .378 average was tied for third on his team, and Romanchik, who hit .352, was third on the team in RBIs with 24 and runs scored with 26.

The trio will look to fill the void left by the graduation of Rodney Hush, who totaled 58 hits, 16 doubles, seven home runs, 45 RBIs and 46 runs scored.

"All three are very good hitters, and they are spread through the lineup," coach Ken Thoel said of Mazza, Hathaway and Romanchik. "It will be hard not to pitch to them."

On the mound, the Cougars have to replace nearly 130 innings with the graduation of Mitch Lovett, Brian Marlinga and Chris Whitney.

"The hardest thing to replace from last season's team was all the quality pitchers we had," Thoel said. "We have a young staff with a lot of potential."

Senior left-hander Hayden Fox, who led Dakota in wins last year with seven and posted a 1.88 ERA in 50 innings pitched, is the leading candidate to fill the void.

"Being 6-4 and having four types of pitches to go to," Thoel said of what makes Fox so effective. "He has a great move to first base and a fastball (at) 85 mph."

Fox, Mazza, Romanchik and Hathaway have already committed to play college baseball and will be uniquely focused on high school baseball this spring.

That focus may be all the more valuable as the Cougars welcome a pair of new teams to the Macomb Area Conference Red Division in Grosse Pointe North and Grosse Pointe South.

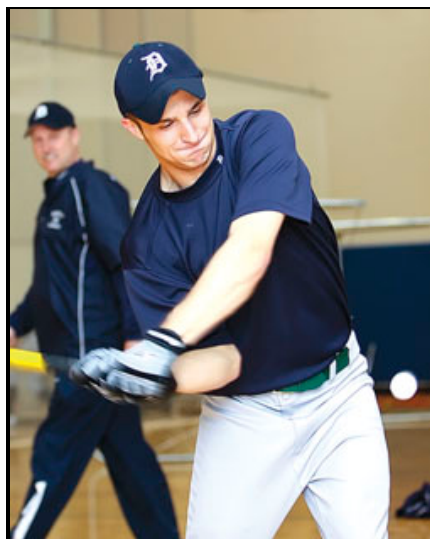


Photo by Tracy Dreslinski  
Macomb Dakota senior Nick Haddad takes batting practice in the Dakota gym March 30.

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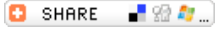
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With the last 12 MAC White titles going to either the Norsemen or Blue Devils, their move to the Red will make a league already comprising defending champion Utica Stevenson, Clinton Township Chippewa Valley and Utica Eisenhower even more daunting.

“Utica (High), (Utica) Ford (II) and Romeo (High) are very good baseball programs,” Thoel said of the teams that moved out of the Red. “I was very sorry to see the teams and the coaches move to the White. We had great games against each other.

“As for the Red now, it is going to be a very tough league. It will prepare you for the playoffs.”

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