



Photos by Tracy Dreslinski
Harrison Township L'Anse Creuse junior pitcher David Pozolo throws against Anchor Bay in the Lancers' 2-0 win April 29 at home.

Off and running

Young L'Anse Creuse baseball races to 10 wins

By Brad D. Bates
C & G Sports Writer

Winning 11 of its first 14 games is usually not on the docket for a baseball squad that starts three sophomores and has had to replace a three-year starter at shortstop.

That's what made it a little surprising to see Harrison Township L'Anse Creuse start 11-3 while auditioning replacements for recently graduated 2008 Macomb Area Conference Blue Division All-Conference shortstop Ryan Champine.

"We've won quite a few tight games," coach Bob Walmsley said. "Our record doesn't indicate what type of team we are really. We're a young team, but we've found ways to win."

The Lancers' ability to find wins was evident early, sweeping a doubleheader (5-4 and 2-0) against Marysville High April 8.

"We scored five runs in the seventh inning of the first game, but before that, we were playing really flat," Walmsley said of his team's come-from-behind win.

"For whatever reason, we clicked in the seventh inning, and we've been playing really well since."

Walmsley points to his team's steady defense, led by the play of sophomore Brian Keyes at shortstop, sophomore catcher Erik Winnega, junior second baseman George Klingbail and junior center fielder Matt Staels, as a reason for its ability to win close games.

"Our shortstop position was up in the air to start the year," Walmsley said. "To fill (Champine's) shoes, we auditioned a couple people. We settled on Brian because he's making plays."

While Keyes is new to his position on varsity, Winnega returns after catching for the

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Lancers as a freshman and has helped anchor the defense and pitching staff.

“Eric is going to be a real good one,” Walmsley said. “He’s already one of the best catchers in the MAC.”

Winnega and pitching coach Steve Kathan help guide the staff — headed by junior right-handers Billy Bolding and David Pozolo — which prides itself on letting the defense do the heavy lifting.

“Our pitchers throw strikes, change speeds and pitch to contact,” Walmsley said. “Steve Kathan does a great job with these kids. (He) teaches three different pitches and pitching to contact, making hitters hit our pitches — not letting them sit on nice juicy fastballs.”

Along with pitching and defense, the Lancers have another valuable commodity — senior leadership.

Despite only having two seniors on the roster, infielder Danny Coyle and outfielder Alex Sjoblom, Walmsley isn’t worried about a lack of leadership for his young squad.

“They both provide us with a lot of leadership,” Walmsley said of Coyle and Sjoblom. “They make sure that practices are run the way I like them to be run.”

Even though the Lancers were quick to the 11-win mark, they did suffer losses in two of their first three league games. Even in those losses, Walmsley’s team showed him that its youth is not a problem.

“The mood of the team is still very positive,” Walmsley said of his squad’s ability to shrug off losses to MAC Blue leaders Fraser High and St. Clair High.

“(Fraser) threw Carson Beauchaine, and he’s a scholarship player going to Saginaw Valley next year. We battled against him, but we just made some mistakes at bad times.

“We know we can beat teams like that as long as we take care of ourselves and limit mistakes.”

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