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Photo by Tracy Dreslinski
 West Bloomfield senior Max Elkins, pictured, said his team was playing with a sense of entitlement earlier this season and it was costing them on the score sheet. Things are much different these days.

That's more like it

With playoffs set to begin, West Bloomfield baseball hitting its stride

By Mike Moore
 C & G Sports Writer

WEST BLOOMFIELD — It was a humbling experience, to say the least, and the guys on the West Bloomfield baseball team were being modest when describing it as that.

A typical mid-week practice had begun, but the varsity squad found itself on the junior varsity field working with the junior varsity coaching staff.

The pings and chatter coming from the varsity field behind the school were made by players on the junior varsity team. They were working with the varsity coaches and occupying the spots the elder statesmen hold every day.

“It was a message the coaches were trying to send to us, and we certainly got it,” said senior catcher Max Elkins. “We had been playing so poorly at that time. We needed a sense of urgency. We needed to be shaken up.”

To that point in the season, up until that somewhat humiliating practice, the Lakers were just 4-9 overall and spiraling into a mediocre season, at best.

“It’s like we went into games expecting to win, like we were entitled to be better than whoever we were playing,” Elkins said. “That’s all changed now. Now we’re working for everything we get. There’s a new sense of focus around the team.”

“We’re starting to have fun again,” said senior shortstop Eric Altman. “We’ve taken a better approach to games and played more like the team we thought we could be.”

Since starting 4-9, the Lakers were 5-2 in their past seven games at press time. The pitching has been much better; the defense has committed fewer mistakes; and offensively, the team has raised its batting average nearly 70 points.

“For a better part of the season, we had three guys that we could count on for

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offense,” coach Pat Watson said. “The past seven games, we’ve been getting contributions from just about everyone.”

Asked what the biggest difference in how his team has been playing is, Watson just laughed.

“If I had that exact answer, I could bottle it up and make millions selling it to baseball coaches across the country,” he said. “The simplest way I can put it is by saying it’s just a matter of execution. Instead of striking out with runners on base, we’re finding a way to get a hit. Instead of that bloop single landing between two guys, we’re finding a way to make a play. For whatever reason, the chemistry was off for a while, and the kids seemed to be second-guessing everything. Now the confidence is sky high, and they’re enjoying themselves.”

The newfound confidence, attitude and success couldn’t have come at a better time. West Bloomfield will kick off the 2009 playoffs May 27 against Birmingham Seaholm at Lathrup Village Southfield-Lathrup. It’s the same Seaholm team that beat the Lakers earlier in the season, in come-from-behind fashion in the bottom of the seventh inning.

“We’re excited to see how far we’ve come, and just what we can do,” Elkins said smiling. “We still feel like we have a lot to prove.”

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