

Galeton High School Baseball Player Going The Extra Mile

By Neil Linderman, Sport Reporter

Area baseball teams concluded their 2008 seasons months ago. But baseball season is rarely if ever over for Talas Mahon, a pitcher on the Galeton varsity baseball squad.

Although Mahon, who is going into his junior year, is a three-sport athlete, he spends much of the year honing his baseball skills; more specifically those involved with pitching.

It has been an involved process; one that Mahon hopes will someday lead to an opportunity to pitch at the college level.

Mahon has spent the last several summers playing travel-league baseball on one of three different teams, going as far afield as Virginia and Florida to compete.

His current travel team, the Virginia Mavericks, recently rounded out their 2008 schedule, during which the squad competed in three states: Virginia, Florida and Delaware; and won the 2008 Junebug Jamboree tournament in Rehoboth Beach, Del. in early June. Mahon gave the Mavericks a lift in the semifinals, giving up only three hits in a complete-game shutout.

“He is holding his own with these other guys,” said Talas’s father Brandon Mahon. “He’s done pretty well.”

Travel ball and varsity baseball keep Mahon competing throughout two seasons of the year. But he doesn’t quit working when the snow begins to fly, either.

Mahon also honed his pitching skills with the help of Elkland native and professional pitcher Dan Cevette in the Galeton High School gymnasium this past winter.

Cevette, who recently retired from professional baseball after spending time at every level of the Cleveland Indians’ farm system, made the drive to Galeton from his home in Elkland to work with Mahon at 6 a.m. twice a week.

Count Cevette among those impressed by the young lefthander from Galeton.

“Surprisingly he was never late once,” said Cevette, who is also a lefty. “He never acted like he was too tired.

“He always acted like he couldn’t wait till next time,” he said. “That’s when you can tell a competitor.

“At the age he’s at, he’s still developing,” Cevette said. “(But) he definitely has the talent.”

Mahon began playing organized baseball several years ago the way many youngsters do; by going out for Little League.

“I started playing the first year I could play, and I never stopped,” Talas said.

But even after Talas, now 15 years old, finished his Little League seasons in June, said Mr. Mahon, his son could never get enough baseball.

After Little League season would conclude, Mr. Mahon said, “he wanted more baseball, so travel ball was our only option. That’s all we had.

“We started out with (a) smaller team just to see how he would like it (going) deep into the summer,” he said.

Talas found his first travel team relatively close to home; in Elkland ; with a squad called the Tioga Athletics.

Later he got his first taste of long-distance travel ball with the New Jersey Cyclones, playing several tournaments with the team.

And for the last two years Mahon, who has been playing travel ball since age 11, has played with the Virginia Mavericks.

Travel ball gives Talas the opportunity to test himself against high-caliber competition, said Mr. Mahon.

“If you’re a decent player here and you want to go to the next level, you’ve got to step outside the box and you’ve got to challenge yourself, I think, to see where you measure up,” Mr. Mahon said. “His team is actually a 15-and-under team (but) they don’t play anything but 16-year-old tournaments. His coach is big on that. He wants you playing up all the time.”

There’s a reason for that, said Mavericks’ assistant coach Chris Hoover; the team was extremely dominant several years ago competing in their own age division.

“If you’re not pushed, you’re out there in second or third gear most of the time,” Hoover said. “We didn’t want them to get comfortable and think it’s always going to be this easy.”

Playing up, he said, “challenged them. It pushed them not to coast. When they’re playing amongst their age group, they’re that good where they win everything; and they did.

“Talas has played at a very high level everywhere he’s gone with us and competed well,” he said. “I’ve seen him have rocky times out (But) most of the time he chewed up innings and did his job and (gave) a tremendous effort.”

Hoover has noticed the difference working with Cevette has made in Talas’s pitching.

“The teaching aspect of it, to me, is as important as getting the competition level up,” Hoover said. “Talas is getting excellent instruction, and you can see it when he plays. That fits into the mechanics of how you play.”

In his early-morning sessions with Talas, Cevette said the focus was on perfecting Talas’s mechanics.

“You’re developing a release point, and it’s all muscle memory,” Cevette said. “If you have bad mechanics, your arm’s never going to be in the right spot. At his age, throwing strikes is an awful important thing.

“(You need to) learn how to throw a fastball consistently because then you can throw other pitches off that pitch,” he said. “Once you get that consistent; you can throw your fastball anywhere; any pitch you throw comes off your fastball.”

Cevette added, “When I left him, he was prepared to pitch against seniors in high school. I was confident he could face the best teams in (Galeton’s) league and... be okay with (just throwing) fastball-changeup.”

Talas, Cevette said, showed some real dedication in working out early in the morning without complaint.

“Nowadays a lot of kids won’t do it,” Cevette said. “He was willing to work hard with me. How good of a kid he is is the main reason I worked with him.”

All of Talas’s hard work has shone through in his time with the Galeton varsity baseball team, which played its inaugural campaign in 2007 and completed its first full varsity schedule this past season, said Tiger head coach John Ogden.

Even as Talas competed against older players in his freshman and sophomore years with the team, Ogden said, he has been able to compete.

Talas’s effort against Bishop Neumann his freshman year and his performance against Elkland last season stick out prominently in Ogden’s mind. As a freshman, Talas struck out eight of the nine batters he faced against Neumann. Then, last season, he pitched one of his best varsity games in a May 8 match up with Elkland; a game which was tied 3-3 after seven innings, was called due to darkness and wasn’t made up. In that game, Talas struck out 12 while surrendering six hits and one walk.

“The Elkland game was pretty much a perfect game for him,” Ogden said. “He ripped right through their order. He just carried us right through that game.

“His numbers he puts up in a game are the direct result of his hard work all year round,” he said. “He goes away and he plays against a talent level that’s probably a little better than it is around here (and as a result) he’s that much more confident in his game.”

Ogden added, “He’s really mature. To see someone that’s that focused on something they want to do is nice. I’m sure he’s just going to wow me the next two years.”

“Talas also works out on his own”, Mr. Mahon said.

“He’s got workout stuff he does in the winter,” Mr. Mahon said. “He’s got a Bowflex, a treadmill. He’s got hitting tools out in the garage. He keeps going at it.”

Talas also plans on going to some baseball clinics this coming winter to get some further instruction; as well as exposure to college coaches and scouts.

“Late winter, early spring we would like to go to some camps and clinics with schools that he’s interested in,” Mr. Mahon said. “That way they can get a look at you first hand at these camps and clinics they have. It’s good exposure.”

Talas will likely play soccer this fall for Galeton and basketball in the winter. And in the spring he hopes he and his Tiger baseball teammates can put together a .500 record in their third season of varsity competition.

Meanwhile, Talas will keep working toward his next goal; a spot on an NCAA roster.

“I want to go as far as I can,” in baseball, Talas said. “But college... if I could make it there, I’d be real happy.”

Cevette said, “He’s definitely good enough to play college ball. (But) he’s got to stick with it; got to work hard.”

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