

Versatile O'Brien led PDS to best year

By Bob Nuse
Sports Editor

Bruce Devlin has a hard time believing his time with Clint O'Brien is finally over.

"It feels like he has been with me for eight years," said Devlin, who coached O'Brien at the varsity level in football and baseball the last four years at Princeton Day School. "I wish we had eight more. I have been fortunate. He's a great kid who works hard. He cares about everyone and the team. He always puts the team first."

"He works hard and is a good leader in that way. He has a great work ethic on the field."

O'Brien's three-year, 12-varsity letter career has finally come to an end at PDS, and the Cranbury resident certainly went out in style. He helped the Panthers to a school-record 16 wins on the baseball field this spring, batting .569 with 37 hits in 65 at bats. A four-year starter at shortstop, O'Brien had six home runs, seven doubles and three triples. He drove in 23 runs and scored a team-high 40 runs in 20 games.

"I spent the last three years trying to be as good as I was my freshman year," said O'Brien, who finished his PDS career with 103 hits. "I think that was still my best year as far as numbers-wise. I think I was playing more baseball back then. I knew this was my last year, so I really wanted to go out on a good note."

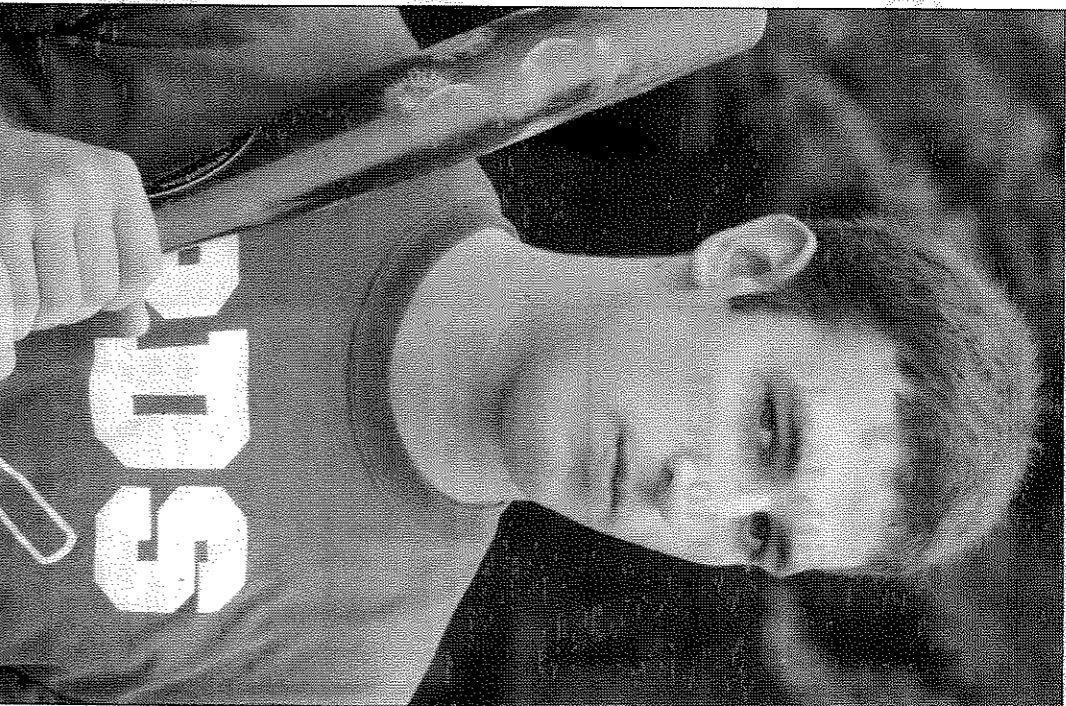
O'Brien graduates from PDS as one of the school's most accomplished athletes. He was a four-year starter at quarterback on the football team and played a year of varsity basketball as a freshman before moving to ice hockey the last three years.

"It seems like forever because I had 12 seasons," O'Brien said. "It hasn't really hit me yet that it's over. Last week it hit me for the first time that I won't play another high school football game. I think I only ended up with two losing seasons in the four sports, so we were pretty successful. I played on a lot of different kinds of teams. I met a lot of different kids. I think I've gotten everything out of it that I wanted to."

He certainly left in grand style on the baseball field, helping the Panthers go 16-4, posting wins over four Prep A foes along the way. PDS earned the top seed in the Mercer County Tournament and the No. 2 seed in the state Prep B tournament. The Panthers were eliminated in the quarterfinals of each tournament.

Clint O'Brien is the Princeton Packet Baseball Player of the Year.

"We didn't finish the way we wanted to, but we did have the best baseball season in school history," said O'Brien.



Staff photo by Mark Czalkowski

Princeton Day School senior Clint O'Brien capped off his baseball career at the school by helping the team to a school-record 16 wins.

who struck out just five times in 65 at bats this season. "We had the most wins. This was the best team that I have played on in my four years at PDS as far as team chemistry and talent wise too. All the guys on the team were close friends. We all ate lunch together every day. The sophomores, freshmen and juniors, we were all really close."

"We all knew what to expect coming into the season and we all had high expectations. We were really goal-oriented this year and I think that helped us."

Devlin felt fortunate to coach O'Brien at the varsity level in both football and baseball. He knows he'll be losing a special player.

"When I saw him as a freshman quarterback and saw the way he could handle that position, I knew that playing shortstop was not going to be a big deal for him because he had the talent," Devlin said. "He's a great athlete. His freshman year he played basketball. And then after that he played hockey for three years. He's just a great kid and a great athlete. He likes his teammates and likes to work hard."

"He always put the team first. The other kids looked up to him and they should. His heart is in the right place. He leads by example."

O'Brien had not played football until he arrived at PDS, yet he was a starter at quarterback from the first game of his

career. He's improved to the point where he plans to play both football and baseball at Gettysburg College.

"Baseball is the sport I grew up with and the one I've played my whole life," said O'Brien, who was also 2-0 on the mound for the Panthers this spring. "I didn't start football until high school. Basketball I played here and there. Hockey I started playing, the stopped and then started again in high school."

"Most kids end up specializing, or at least they pick two. It was something I talked about with my dad, but I couldn't see myself doing it. The one season I was going to take off was winter of my junior year, but I couldn't do it. I love each sport too much."

And now he'll play two in college. Although until recently, he thought he would just be playing baseball once he left PDS.

"It wasn't until this year that I made that decision," O'Brien said. "I was doing the college search for strictly baseball and looking at some Division I schools. It was probably a quarter of the way through the football season that I realized I didn't want to stop playing football. So I changed my whole college search around to the smaller Division III schools so I could do both."

O'Brien will get a taste of what it is like to do both this summer, as he will be playing for Princeton Post 218 in the Mercer County American Legion League, while also playing in the Bridge League with players from the Shore Area. In addition, O'Brien will play in the Sunshine Classic football game on July 2, where he will be a quarterback for the West team.

"He had a couple Division I schools lined up for baseball," Devlin said. "But he didn't want to choose between the two sports. I would have said just baseball for him, until last year. But he loves football as well. I think he'll be able to do it. He'll get an idea of what it is like to do both coming up with the Carpenter Cup and the Sunshine football game. He'll see what the pace is like."

He'll also have to learn a new environment and adjust to some new coaching, which he hasn't had to do often at PDS.

"It will be different being coached by someone else because for eight seasons I have had Coach Devlin," O'Brien said. "Even coaching aside, he's been a great friend to me the last four years. It will be weird not having him around."

And it will be just as strange for PDS not to have O'Brien around. After all, he's been a fixture on one field or another for the last four years.

ALL-PACKET BASEBALL

Position	Player	School	Year
First base	Steve Perone	Montgomery	Sr.
Second base	Dennis Cannon	Princeton Day	So.
Shortstop	Clint O'Brien	Princeton Day	Sr.
Third base	David Putnam	Hun School	Sr.
Outfield	Mitch Liebowitz	WW-P South	Sr.
Outfield	Mark Madden	Princeton Day	Sr.
Outfield	Mike Shimkin	Princeton Day	Sr.
Catcher	Jon Scott	Princeton Day	So.
Pitcher	Mike Russo	Hun School	Sr.
Designated Hitter	Scott Kelly	WW-P North	Jr.

PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Clint O'Brien, Princeton Day
COACH OF THE YEAR
Bruce Devlin, Princeton Day