

Graduation can't stop Nottingham

BY KEVIN MALONEY
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Nottingham captured the first-ever Mercer County Tournament in school history last year the old fashioned way: dominating pitching, timely hitting and error-free defense.

On the heels of the successful spring campaign, many of those same players helped North Trenton Post 458 to reach the Final Eight for the first time in program history.

But the Northstars were hit particularly hard by graduation losing Jake Schwarz, Pete Kelly, Chris Pierfy, Brandon Martin and Steve DeBonis along with a handful of other key contributors.

Standout shortstop Matt Chotkowski returned for his senior season, and while he had some nice young talent surrounding him in Eric Patterson, Mike Mimmo, Jordan Guest and Jon Kreticki, expectations surrounding the Northstars were moderate.

Perhaps the biggest question surrounding Nottingham was who was going to hit behind and provide protection for Chotkowski? Enter the Northstars' biggest player stature-wise, 6-foot-4 first baseman/pitcher Matt Patterson.

"Towards the end of my legion season I started getting it going," said Patterson, who registered just 10 varsity at-bats last year.

"I was getting a lot more at-bats and taking a better approach. I did a lot of work over at the (Dave) Gallagher Baseball Academy and they helped me out with a lot of little things; tweaked some stuff with my batting stance, and I carried it all the way through to the start of the season. I've listened to what (Gallagher) told me to do and it's worked out."

The junior has been a major reason why Nottingham is off to a 12-2 start, including a 12-game winning streak (that was snapped by Robbinsville on Wednesday) that matched a 21-year old school record.

"He's hitting anything they are throwing at him," Langdon said. "He's nice and relaxed and his hands are real quick through the zone. He's just concentrating on hitting line drives."

Patterson is hitting a team-high 500 with two home runs and 14 RBIs. Thanks to the tips he picked

TIMES TOP 10

Overall record in parentheses
Records, statistics through Wednesday

1. Hunterdon Central 11-0
2. Steiert 15-1
3. Nottingham 12-2
4. West Windsor-Plainsboro North 10-2
5. Ewing 9-3
6. Lawrenceville 7-5
7. Peddle 7-5
8. Hopewell Valley 5-6
9. Notre Dame 7-5
10. Princeton Day School 5-3

CVC STANDINGS

COLONIAL DIVISION

	Conference			All Games		
	W	L	PCT	W	L	PCT
Steiert.....	11	0	1.000	15	1	.938
Notre Dame.....	6	4	.600	7	5	.583
WW-P South.....	2	5	.286	6	6	.500
Hightstown.....	2	8	.200	5	7	.417
Trenton.....	0	9	.000	2	10	.167

VALLEY DIVISION

	Conference			All Games		
	W	L	PCT	W	L	PCT
WW-P North.....	8	1	.889	10	2	.833
Nottingham.....	9	2	.818	12	2	.857
Lawrence.....	4	4	.500	4	6	.400
Hamilton.....	5	6	.455	7	7	.500

PATRIOT DIVISION

	Conference			All Games		
	W	L	PCT	W	L	PCT
Ewing.....	8	3	.727	9	3	.750
Hopewell Valley.....	5	5	.500	7	5	.583
Robbinsville.....	4	6	.400	7	7	.500
Allentown.....	3	7	.300	3	8	.273
Princeton.....	2	9	.182	3	11	.214

up working Gallagher, and the early success those tips have contributed to, Patterson said his confidence level is through the roof.

"My technique work has given me a lot more confidence," Patterson said. "I'm just trying to be a leader and just do everything I can do to help us win."

Nottingham's potent lineup — it's 103 runs scored this season is second to only Steiert's 105, which has played two more games — has been forcing opposing teams to pick their poison.

Guest is one of the premier leadoff hitters in the CVC, Eric Patterson does all the little things right, and Chotkowski (.424/three triples/12 RBIs) is off to the start that many, included himself, expected him to get off to.

And teams don't have the luxury of pitching around Patterson either because one of the CVC's top competitors, Mike Mimmo, and one of the leagues biggest surprises, Mike O'Byrne (.429/four doubles) are waiting on deck.

"What they are doing is definitely helping me out," Patterson said. "They're getting on in front of me and other teams have to pitch to me. I'm just getting my pitches and fortunately I'm hitting them."

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BASEBALL SPOTLIGHT