

Drahozal is surprising star for Kirkwood

Written by Metro Sports Report
Saturday, 21 March 2015 20:14 -



Nick Drahozal had modest success as a baseball player at Xavier High school, but it was nothing special and not enough to have college recruiters knocking on his door.

He actually did a little better in wrestling, finishing as high as fifth at the state tournament for the Saints. In fact, he figured wrestling might be his best bet in college.

"I was going to wrestle at Coe or Cornell," he said Saturday, "but then I decided, 'You know what? I don't know what I want to do major-wise and everything.' So I thought I'd go to Kirkwood."

Drahozal enrolled at Kirkwood last summer and noticed the Eagles were having open tryouts for the baseball team. What the heck, he thought. Let's give it a shot.

"I just wanted to see if I could make the team or not," he said.

Boy, did he ever.

Drahozal impressed Kirkwood Coach Todd Rima and has done an exceptional job as a starting pitcher, compiling a 2-2 record and 1.48 ERA in five appearances so far.

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Drahozal earned the starting assignment Saturday in the opening game of a four-game series against 20th-ranked DMACC and beat the Bears, 8-2, in a conference game at the Kirkwood field.

DMACC rebounded and won the second game, 7-2.

Drahozal pitched a complete game in the opener and took a shutout into the seventh and final inning before allowing a two-run homer on perhaps his only fat pitch of the afternoon with a comfortable 8-0 lead.

He allowed just five hits, with six strikeouts and two walks.



"I thought I did all right. There are definitely things to work on," he said modestly. "I look good because the defense behind me has been tough. We have some good players."

Drahozal had a 2-3 record and 3.43 ERA at Xavier last year as a senior and batted .245. He was not recruited by Kirkwood and did not tell Rima he planned to try out for the club.

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"He showed up at walk-on tryouts and threw one ball from right field as an outfielder at 87 (mph) and we said, 'That's enough. We want to see you on the mound,'" Rima recalled Saturday.

"The progress he's made is unbelievable. I saw him a few times in high school, and what he's doing for us right now is incredible. Confidence-wise, I think he's a different person on the mound.

"It's pretty neat. I'm very happy for him. He's worked really hard."

Drahozal struck out 28 batters in 32.2 innings for Xavier last season, but he also walked 24 guys. This year he's struck out 27 batters in 24.1 innings for Kirkwood, but he's walked only four batters and allowed only four earned runs.

Drahozal does not have an overpowering fastball, but spots it well. He has a nasty curveball that he keeps low at the knees and ankles, and he keeps hitters off-balance with an occasional changeup.

"He doesn't throw anything straight. Everything moves," said Rima. "His fastball cuts, and he's not afraid to challenge guys.

"He's a competitive kid and he's going to do whatever it takes. He's got the wrestling mentality."

Drahozal has gone from being an uninvited walk-on to one of the top pitchers at Kirkwood, good enough to stop the 20th-ranked team in the country.

"It feels pretty good," he said. "Hopefully things will keep going the way they have been. Hopefully I can keep it up."

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His wrestling days are over. Instead, he could be headed to a four-year school as a crafty left-handed pitcher once he's done at Kirkwood.

"Hopefully I can get a pretty good offer to go somewhere," he said, "but I don't know."

Randy Perez had a double, two hits and three RBIs for Kirkwood in the opener. Toran Shahidi had two hits and two RBIs.

Freshman Emanuel Castellano pitched a strong game for Kirkwood in the nightcap and had a 2-0 lead after six innings, but DMACC took a 3-2 lead in the top of the seventh on a two-run homer by Levi Schreiner. Schreiner is the same guy who hit the two-run homer against Drahozal in the first contest.

The split left Kirkwood at 10-8 overall and 1-1 in the conference. The DMACC Bears are 10-9 and 1-1. The same two teams play another doubleheader Sunday at 1 p.m. at Kirkwood.

Game 1

DMACC 000 000 2 - 2 5 2
Kirkwood 061 001 x - 8 8 0

Peters and Mroska. Drahozal and Shahidi. W - Drahozal (2-2). L - Peters (3-1). 2B - Adams (K), Perez, Shahidi. HR - Schreiner.

Game 2

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DMACC 000 000 304 - 7 7 0

Kirkwood 000 002 000 - 2 7 1

Jackson, Duncan (7), Harmon (7) and Mathiowetz. Castellano, Sloane (8), Marra (9) and Shahidi. W - Jackson (2-1). L - Castellano (2-1). 2B - Adams (D), Adams (K). HR - Schreiner.