

Daniels will play ball at Iowa

Written by Jim Ecker

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Cedar Rapids Kennedy senior Zach Daniels has been a big fan of the Iowa Hawkeyes all his life. Now he'll be a Hawkeye himself and he couldn't be happier.

Daniels has accepted an offer to play baseball for UI Coach Rick Heller after he finishes his career with the Cougars next season.

Daniels made the Elite All-State team this past season with a remarkable year as a pitcher, hitter and second baseman for the Cougars.

Now he'll be taking his talents to Iowa.

"Some of my family have gone there and I grew up being a Hawkeye, so it just felt like the right fit," he said Monday night. "I just really liked the coaching staff at Iowa and their facilities and the resources they have. I just really liked what they have to offer.

"Iowa is close," he said. "My parents have been there for me since I was little for baseball, so I kind of want to stay close to home."

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Daniels compiled an 8-1 record and 1.01 ERA on the mound at Kennedy last season as a junior. He struck out 42 batters in 62.2 innings and walked 13.

Daniels also hit .467 for the Cougars with 32 RBIs. He went 22-for-23 in stolen bases and struck out only two times in 37 games.

Daniels helped Kennedy compile a 31-7 record and reach the Class 4A state tournament.

Daniels hit 90 mph on the radar gun while playing for a Perfect Game all-star team at a tournament in Arizona recently. He had reached the high 80's at Kennedy, but this was the first time he hit 90.

Iowa has recruited Daniels primarily as a pitcher, but Heller has promised to give him a chance to earn playing time as a middle infielder as well. The Hawkeyes will look at him as a starter and closer.

"Whatever they have me play will be fine with me," he said.

Daniels had offers from Kirkwood, Iowa Western and Iowa Central, but decided to skip the junior college route and go straight to NCAA Division I baseball with Iowa. Illinois State and St. Louis wanted to watch him pitch this fall, but had not made an offer.

"I decided that even if they were to give me a pretty good offer, I think Iowa is the place for me," he said. "When I went on a visit there they said they were done recruiting pitchers last winter. And then I just bloomed late and they showed interest. I just felt like they really wanted me."

Daniels will begin his career at Iowa as a recruited walk-on, but he's been guaranteed

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scholarship money after that.

He said he's relieved to know where he's going for college. "For the rest of fall ball I can just focus on playing instead of thinking about what coaches are going to be there," he remarked.