

Japan-Metro Classic: Zach Daniels

Written by Jim Ecker
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CLINTON - Zach Daniels heard some of the snickers when he was younger.

Some people thought he wasn't big enough, strong enough or good enough to be a successful high school baseball player.

Boy, were they wrong.

Daniels just finished one of the most successful high school careers in Metro history as an accomplished hitter, pitcher, middle infielder and base-stealer for the Kennedy Cougars.

His crowning achievement came Saturday morning when he was named the Player of the Year for the entire state by the Iowa High School Baseball Coaches Association.

Daniels hit .438 during his career at Kennedy, topped by an eye-popping average of .519 this season. He recorded a 17-5 record on the mound with a career 1.85 ERA. He stole 59 bases in 63 attempts, made dazzling plays on defense and helped the Cougars make two straight trips to the Class 4A state tournament.

Not bad for a kid who supposedly wasn't big enough, strong enough or good enough to play the game.

Daniels will make his final appearance in a Kennedy uniform Thursday night when he plays in the Japan-Metro All-Star Classic at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

"I definitely reached some of the goals I was working toward," he said Saturday after playing in the IHSBCA all-star series at Ashford University Field in Clinton. "I kind of like being an under-rated player on the field, because then everyone looks past me and stuff.

"I think I've proven them wrong and I think that's what I've done over my career. A lot of people doubted me, and hopefully I can keep proving them wrong the next couple of years."

Daniels will be joining the University of Iowa baseball program next week as a recruited freshman. Coach Rick Heller has promised to give him a shot as a pitcher and infielder, so the rest will be up to Daniels.

He'd live to be a pitcher AND infielder with the Hawkeyes, but will happily accept any assignment.

"I don't care what I do there, I just want to get some playing time," he said. "If I just go out there and do my thing, I'll be fine."

Daniels broke the single-season records at Kennedy this season with 70 hits and 19 doubles. His .519 batting average was the second-best in school history and his five triples tied for second-best.

Daniels also wrote his name into the career record book and finished third all-time in stolen bases (59), third in doubles (35), third in triples (8), third in batting average (.438), sixth in runs scored (105) and seventh in RBIs (83).

The honors began rolling in last year when he was named first team all-state by the Iowa Newspaper Association and the IHSBCA, as well as being named the captain of the IHSBCA Class 4A team.

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This year he was named the captain of the Class 4A all-state team by the Iowa Newspaper Association and now has been honored as the Player of the Year by the IHSBCA, covering thousands of players throughout Iowa.

He learned about the Player of the Year award Saturday morning at the IHSBCA banquet.

"You're supposed to give a little speech," said Daniels, never a big talker. "It was about 10 or 15 seconds. I was just going to say it as fast as I could and then walk back to my seat."

Daniels did most of his talking during his prep career with his bat, glove and right arm.