

SPORTS



For MLB stars, World Classic an oxymoron

W Adriana Zalloni
Sports Editor

The 2009 World Baseball Classic (WBC) finished on March 23 in the Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles. An international baseball tournament created in 2006 by Major League Baseball (MLB), the Major League Baseball Players' Association and other baseball leagues around the world allows for national teams to compete.

In theory, it provides a venue for the best baseball players in the world to compete against one another, representing their

Participating in these international games poses the risk of serious injuries before the players' real seasons begin

home countries. In actuality, the WBC is a joke.

I am all for a good sports jingofest, like the Olympics. However, frankly, it is just not smart for the MLB players to participate several reasons.

On one hand, the WBC is much too close to the regular baseball season. The players are highly likely to be injured before the real games start.

The MLB season begins at the start of April, only a few days after the WBC ends. When the idea for the WBC was first

It was the concern of multiple people, including New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, that participation in the WBC would lead to injuries before the start of spring training and the professional season

broached by Commissioner Bud Selig earlier in the decade, it was the concern of multiple people, including New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, that participation in the WBC would lead to injuries before the start of spring training and the professional season. Steinbrenner had the right idea. Participating in these international games poses the risk of serious injuries before the players' real seasons begin. Some of the best professional players realize how high a risk this is, so they choose to refrain from playing in the games.

This year proved Steinbrenner's point. As the games continued, more and more injuries were sustained by professional players. In a period of only two days, the United States saw four players go down with injuries: Atlanta Braves third baseman Chipper Jones (right oblique strain), Boston Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia (left oblique strain), Florida Marlins pitcher Matt Lindstrom (strained right rotator cuff) and Milwaukee Brewers outfielder Ryan Braun (strained right side). The injuries range from serious to minor, including New York Mets third baseman David Wright's cracked toenail.

Furthermore, one would think that the countries with the most Major Leaguers would dominate. Not so. While the U.S., Dominican Republic, and Venezuela—squads dominated by big leaguers—fell by the wayside, the WBC final featured back-to-back champion Japan vs. South Korea, teams with a handful of Major League players between them.

What can we learn from this? The Asian teams—playing for national pride and exposure that might get them a call from an MLB general manager—played their hearts out, while the fat cat Americans and Latin Americans tried—unsuccessfully—not to hurt themselves. What kind of world tournament is that? Imagine if Shaun White decided to dog it in the Olympics because he wanted to save himself for the lucrative Extreme Games?

The WBC may be a fun tournament to watch. However, it is not an accurate barometer of the quality of baseball throughout the world. Thus, it is, ultimately, meaningless.

Gymnasts raise the bar on competition

W Morgan Quilici
Staff Writer

It is spring sports time again, and the boys' gymnastics team is off to a great start. The team, led by Steve Foerch, has won two meets so far and placed fourth in the Niles West Invitational on March 14.

"We are off to an excellent start," Foerch said. "I think we can place second or possibly first in conference and my goal is five state qualifiers."

Senior varsity captain Jake Ganellen (all around) commented on the team's improvement.

"We've jumped six points from our first invitational, so we are coming together really well. It is really good to see the entire

team stepping up so we can continue to be as good of a team this year as we were last year," Ganellen added.

The other varsity captains this year are seniors Chris Deamont (all around) and Mike Masanek (high bar, vault and rings).

So far, the Wolves have been led by Ganellen who had four first place finishes against Evanston and three at the meet against Niles North and Maine East. Deamont also placed first in all around in the meet against Evanston and at the meet against Niles North and Maine East.

"I think this team has improved a lot, but we have a long way to go and there is still plenty of room for improvement," Foerch said.

The Wolves plans to use their great start to their advantage in their future meets.

The Wolves host the Burkel Invitational on April 4, and their next dual meet is on April 7 against Maine South.



Chris Deamont shows his skill on the pommel horse. Photo by Morgan Quilici

Girls' track team breaks out of the blocks

W Mary Basic
Staff Writer

The girls' track and field team is off to a quick start, with a 3-1 dual meet record and an eighth place finish in the 26-team Hononegah meet on March 7.



Gstalter

With a solid indoor season behind them, head coach Mark Medland expressed his expectations for the team's outdoor season.

Senior shot putter Margaux Lim said that the team has been working really hard, a sentiment echoed by senior sprint Jasmine Ramahi.

"We have a great group of girls and cannot wait to get into [the] outdoor [season], because that is when things get really serious," senior sprinter Jasmine Ramahi said.

Medland said that the team's goal is to qualify as many athletes for the state meet in May at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston.

The team has one returning state qualifier, junior distance runner Megumi Hoshi, while senior hurdler Molly Gstalter has been very close to qualifying for the past two years.

"Hoshi and Gstalter have been leading the way as far as points scored, Those two are capable of scoring 20 points each," Medland said.

Hoshi currently holds the school record for the 800 m run and also a record at the Whitewater Invitational in Wisconsin for 800 m.

"Hoshi and Gstalter are our top scorers and Sharreese Hunt who transferred back from Niles North is our top sprinter,"

Medland said. "Edelynn Cayas has been scoring a lot of points lately. Natalie Chavez is our top 400 meter runner. Two freshmen, Milena Zalloni and Jessica Sutfin, have been scoring points for us also," he added.

Medland sized up the competition.

"Evanston is the top team in the area, but New Trier and Maine South are other competitions," he said.

Gstalter agrees.

"Track is not like other sports when it comes to competition. Each school has certain girls in each event that are very good. Evanston is known for sprinters, while New Trier normally has a good distance team. My biggest competition in the hurdles comes from Evanston," Gstalter said.

Hoshi says her biggest competition is herself.

"As a runner, you need to be mentally and physically tough," she said.

"If you tell yourself that you can not do it, you will not be able to do it. Although I love competition, I always strive for my personal best. I believe that as long as you try your best, it doesn't matter if you come in first or last, it's the effort that truly counts."

Injuries that plagued last year's seniors necessitated the rapid development of the less experienced team members.

"We learned early what it would be like without our seniors from last year, because several got hurt," Medland said.

That experience primed this year's team to succeed.

"I want to make this year the best. It is my last season, and we [want] to end with a bang!" Gstalter said.

The girls' next meet will be Thursday, April 9, at New Trier at 4:30 pm.



Hoshi

WestWord

Softball team comes out swinging despite difficulties

W Adriana Zalloni
Sports Editor

Head varsity softball coach Stephen Ramseyer expects the season to reflect the hard work that the girls have put forth in practice.

“We are coming off a 13-20 season last year,” Ramseyer said. “The girls have been working very hard during practice.”

Junior infielder Kelly Kleppin, a team captain, agrees that the team has been working hard.

“It is hard for athletes to jump right into a new season and get into shape, but the effort put forth by each girl on our team has been evident by the amount we have accomplished in such a short period of time,” Kleppin said. “We are really working hard to get better every day.”

Due to vacations and the loss of key players to graduation, various changes in positions of the team members have been made.

“There is going to be a different look in both the infield and outfield this year,” Ramseyer said. “Our number one hitter from last year, Carli Peters, graduated, but we are coping with that loss quite well. We will also have to juggle the lineup because of spring break vacations. We won’t know exactly what we have until after

the first four weeks of the season because the girls are not playing in their normal spots.”

Senior outfielder and co-captain Nicole Melfi expressed confidence in her teammates and their abilities on the field.

“We have a really strong group of [returning players] in the infield as well as the outfield,” Melfi said. “They have become comfortable with each other, which makes us hopeful for the season.”

According to the various team members, the team’s chemistry will play a key role in the success of the girls.

“We have unbelievable team chemistry this year,” said co-captain Julie Schwenk, a junior pitcher. “We all get along so well. That is going to play a big part in how well we do this year.”

Junior catcher Lauren Shimanovsky agrees.

“That chemistry and our constant desire to improve our game might prove to be just what we need to have a successful season.”

Shimanovsky said.

Junior IF Jennie DiJohn concurs, but she knows what it will take to truly make the team

getting our bats going and stringing together some hits.”

Multiple injuries have already begun to take a toll on the players.

“We have some start of season arm soreness,” Ramseyer said. “Growing pains, sprained ankles, things like that. Injuries are part of the game. We have a few girls who are playing through them.”

Other players include: seniors Michelle Bucior (OF) and Rebecca Marohn (IF); juniors Maggie Kearns (OF), Paige Quilici (OF) and Sarah Espinosa (OF) and sophomores Joanna LeFevre (OH), Laurie DiJohn (IF) and Shelby Peters (OF).

The Wolves defeated St. Ignatius by a final score of 4-2 in the first of two games on March 21. They lost the second game 12-2 on the same day. On March 26, the Wolves defeated Leyden High School by a final score of 6-5. On March 27, they lost to Stevenson 9-1.

Their next game will be held today at Elmwood Park at 4:45 p.m.



Julie Schwenk pitches a victory against St. Ignatius. Photo by Naomi Prale

Boys’ track team remains optimistic as the dash for state continues

W Mary Basic
Staff Writer

The boys’ varsity track and field team has started off on shaky ground, but head coach Chris Vivone feels that soon they will be back on track.

“We really have not geared up to win a lot of these meets,” Vivone said. “We are just trying to run everybody now and get everybody in shape.”

Senior captain and distance runner Alex Zasso says that the season is going pretty well, but that the indoor season is really just a warm up for outdoor, so they aren’t too concerned with running their best times quite yet.

“Our team is very talented this year, and with our revamped coaching line up that now includes Jorge Perez and Mike Grossman, there is nothing stopping us from achieving those goals,” junior distance runner Ned McElfresh said.

Senior high jumper Brent Carducci said that last year’s seniors taught them how to be a team and how to work together to achieve goals.

“We are working hard and seeing some results, but we know we can be a lot better and we are working toward getting a lot better,” junior distance George Davros said.



Vivone says that the team wants to be the best at conference and sectionals.

“I am most excited for sectional because it is not just a team from the conference, it is from our whole sectional, and if we do good our hard work will be rewarded,” said junior triple jumper

Rodney Metellus, whose personal goal this season is to break his brother’s record and place in state.

Carducci shares Metellus’s enthusiasm. “I am most excited for sectionals. It is the meet that counts the most, and it is where you see what big competition you have,” said Carducci, who hopes to qualify for the state meet.

Vivone says that the goal for every season is to win conference and sectionals.

“We do have a good team; I think we can definitely contend for conference title,” Vivone said.

Zasso says that the team goal is to be competitive with the best teams in their conference and sectional and to qualify numerous individuals and relays for the state meet.

“My goal is to qualify for the state in the 3200 m run, which takes a time of 9:33 or better at the sectional meet,” Zasso said.

Zasso said that he looks forward to the

Saturday, May 2, Jim Arner Invite at Glenbard West, which he feels presents the most competition.

One the other hand, Davros said that he eagerly anticipates the Don Relays on Friday, April 24, at 5 p.m. at Notre Dame in Niles. He expects the team to break the distance medley relay it set last year.

McElfresh said that the Central Suburban League South title chase will be a two-team race, with a triumvirate of teams vying for the sectional crown.

“Our biggest competition in our conference is Evanston and in our sectional is Niles North. Both teams are perennial power houses, as in Niles West in my opinion,” McElfresh said.

With such challenges ahead, will he Wolves be up to the task? Senior sprinter Chris Wright believes that they will.

“All the guys on the team understand that even though we don’t have a lot of depth, we still have the skill to hang with top schools in the state,” Wright said.

The next meet will be on tomorrow at Andrew High School in Tinley at 10 a.m.

Tennis team hopes to smash through competition with strong roster

W Rexly Penaflores II
Managing Editor

While the gloomy weather outside does not bode well for the start of the tennis season, boys’ tennis team head coach Brad Wilson’s attitude is sunny at the prospects for this season.

The primary reason for his optimism is the fact that his players participated in off-season activities.

“The fact that the boys played competitively in the off-season means that we can have more productive practices during season,” Wilson said.

Wilson’s good humor even has turned what might seem like a negative into a positive: a smaller than normal turnout.

“We [as the coaches] wanted better management within the three levels of the team. We have had a smaller team this year than ever before, and I think that helps a lot. The ratio of players to teachers is 10:1 and I like it,” Wilson said.

Central Suburban League South’s rule changes have precipitated some logistical issues. Wilson says that the team has adjusted.

“This year, our conference changed the format of play. In previous years, we had had four singles players and three doubles players,” Wilson said. “In this year and in the future, we are going to have three singles players and four doubles players. Because of that change, we needed extra players that had great skills and quick reactions. In the end, the juniors came through.”

Wilson provided a thumbnail sketch of his team.

“[Junior] Volodymyr [Zverkovskiy] has to be one of our best players. He has a lot of experience under his belt and is one of our important singles players. He is also our captain, which is great because the team looks up to him,” Wilson said.

Teammates agree.

“[Zverkovskiy] is one of the best players that we have,” junior Sae Bom Lee said. “He can be a very good player in the clutch and is a hard worker.”

Wilson also lauded sophomore Daniel

Langer, who has made rapid progress since his elevation to the varsity squad at mid-season last year.

“Langer’s first varsity match was against Maine South. He played the deciding game of the match, and he never played varsity before. [Langer’s] winning that game showed me that he handled himself well under pressure and that he could be a valuable player on the varsity squad,” Wilson said.

Optimism aside, Wilson has no illusions about the tough road ahead.

“We are in one of the toughest conferences in the state, no doubt about that. Teams like Loyola, Evanston, North Shore Country Day and New Trier are the big powerhouses in the conference. With teams like those, it becomes really hard for us to get past sectionals and onto the state matches,” Wilson said.

As such, Wilson purposefully scheduled non-conference matches to give his team experience. “A team like Buffalo Grove is a good team for us to play because it allows us to let every player participate in the match. We can have the entire team play doubles because Buffalo Grove is out of our conference,” Wilson said.

Although wins and losses are important, individual achievement and improvement are priorities for Wilson.

“[Although] we have been able to succeed over the years by building up a good team record over the past few seasons, at the end of this year, I want each player to feel like they really worked hard in practice and all of that hard work paid off in their matches. Most of all, I want them to keep playing tennis after the season is over so we can start the next season stronger than ever.”

Personal goals do not preclude team success, however.

“The team has a lot of devotion and determination,” Lee said. “This team is great, and if we try really hard, we can get somewhere this season.”

The team consists of seniors Matt Swanson, Aaron Davis and Jon Dagdagan; juniors Zverkovskiy, Lee, Jan Wei-Pand, Steven Chang, Andrew Alsterda, Avi Schneider and Vikas Auluck and sophomores Langer, Antonio Kim and Edmund Phan.

Their next meet is on April 7 at home against Wheeling High School at 4:45 p.m.

SPORTS

New Cubs roster received with mixed results

W Daniel Blazek
Staff Writer

Here we go baseball fans; it is once again the time of year for old-fashioned favorites such as peanuts, hot dogs, curses (along with cursing) and managers getting thrown out for arguing the dumbest of calls, all for ticket prices that leave our wallets crying. You guessed it: the 2009 Major League Baseball season has finally begun.

Coming off of a good year, but miserable post-season, the Chicago Cubs have made some big changes that (hopefully) will not undermine their chances of once again coming out on top in the National League Central Division. In addition to making sure the company is handed over to a worthy owner (good luck Tom Ricketts), the entire organization needs to make sure they make decisions for the best possible chance to not only win the division, but get *past* the first round of the playoffs, or at least win *one game* (cue crying fans).

The Cubs took advantage of many opportunities during the course of the off-season and have made many deals, whether through trades or with free agency. For those of you who have not kept up with the transaction list, the players who have left since 2008 and have joined for 2009 are as follows:

Departed

Henry Blanco - C
Ronny Cedeno - IF
Mark DeRosa - IF/OF
Daryle Ward - IF/OF/PH
Jim Edmonds - OF
Felix Pie - OF
Bob Howry - P
Jon Lieber - P
Jason Marquis - P
Kerry Wood - P
Michael Wuertz - P
Rich Hill-P

Acquired/Promoted

Koyie Hill- C
Aaron Miles - IF
Milton Bradley -OF
Micah Hoffpauir-IF/OF
Joey Gathright - OF
Brad Snyder - OF
Kevin Gregg - P
Aaron Heilman - P
Luis Vizcaino - P

Comparing the two years above, it is obvious that some game-changing deals have occurred in the last couple of months. I, for one, have a mixture of feelings, being ~~angry~~ ~~that they got rid of Kerry Wood~~ surprised and jumping for joy ~~they got rid of Bob Howry~~ not surprised.

First, I will get to the positives. The Cubs did an excellent job of keeping to the same style of team that they have had the last couple of years, for it obviously is working in the regular season, now having a dominating presence in the National League Central. Many teams in history have had a potential championship-winning team, yet completely eviscerated their roster in the off-season as an attempt to "improve" it. The Cubs have seemingly avoided this situation, adding consistent players, both young and old.

The pitching staff for the Cubs has been its strong suit in past years and is now even stronger with new additions such as Aaron Heilman, Kevin Gregg and Luis Vizcaino. All three of these guys have proven that they can pitch when the time calls for it, although their numbers from last season may not show the best of what they can do.

Gregg has illustrated that he has a solid closer mentality, but he has to prove that he

can dominate that spot in the regular season. Heilman and Vizcaino are also good role players coming from the bullpen.



The standout strength that the Cubs will show all year is the starting rotation with the outstanding skills of Carlos Zambrano, Rich Harden, who is going to play the full year with the Cubs for the first time, Ryan Dempster, Ted Lilly and Sean Marshall, who has proven to manager Lou Pinella that he can do well as a fifth spot starter. The bullpen this year appears to have the determination and ability to back these All-Star pitchers up.

The hitting this year is also taking a new turn, with the biggest addition being the signing of outfielder Milton Bradley. This was a good decision for the Cubs, for Bradley brings both a good contact and power presence as a left hander along with the fact that he is coming off of his best year in the Majors.

Other additions include perennial September call-up Micah Hoffpauir and Joey Gathright, who make pretty decent backups for Derrek Lee, Bradley, Alfonso Soriano, Kosuke Fukudome and Reed Johnson. The Cubs also seem to be starting a new trend of picking up ex-Cardinal players, for infielder Aaron Miles is now playing in Chicago instead of St. Louis. He is definitely not what one would define as a power hitter, but he makes good contact with the ball and plays all of the infield positions fairly well. Catcher Koyie Hill, who has shuttled between AAA Iowa and the Cubs, is also on the squad as the backup for Rookie of the Year Geovany Soto,

giving the team two young backstops, both of which should be fresh in October—knock on wood.

Now, for the negatives, an easier analysis, for there are not many glaring weaknesses that flash warning signs in my head. I personally think that the Cubs should have made a greater effort to improve the bullpen, for it still appears that it lacks the luster to carry a team when the starters are having a bad day.

Granted, they did get rid of some of the pitchers that continued to struggle throughout the whole year, but also gave up a person whose time, I think, was not yet over: closer Kerry Wood. Disregarding the fact that he is one of my favorite pitchers, Wood rediscovered the knack of an overpowering and baffling hitters last year. I am fully aware that he is not what he once was, but I have a sinking feeling that he will do even better in Baltimore, leaving the Cubs organization shaking their heads about the fact that they chose to rely on Gregg, who has not put up the most impressive statistics in previous years.

I also believe that not re-signing backup catcher Henry Blanco (AKA Hank White) will prove to be a mistake. While on the downside of his career, Blanco's biggest contributions last year were his mentoring of Soto and his connection with the pitching staff.

I also believe that although Bradley is an outstanding new addition, the Cubs might have done a little better going for a corner outfielder with a bit more pop in his bat, a less volatile personality and more willingness to play hurt than Bradley has exhibited during his checkered career.

All in all, this year looks as if it has the potential to be a good one for the Cubbies (and by good, I mean getting to World Series and not leaving us crying and screaming at our televisions at home because we cannot win a playoff game). I know I will do everything in my power to support this team, and I expect every other Cub fans to do the same. Like every member of Cubs Nation, my hope springs eternal that this will be "next year."

Team chemistry becomes a crucial part of baseball team's success

W Adriana Zalloni
Sports Editor

Even after losing four key players to graduation, head coach Gary Gustafson expressed optimism about the nascent baseball season.

"We had a good team last year, with a final record of 17-11," Gustafson said. "We lost Niko Tountas, Nolan Merea, Chris Kontos and Joe Willer. Those are big losses in the middle of the order; however, we feel like we [acquired] some new guys to fill in. There is no reason we won't be as good as we were last year."

Senior catcher Brendan Ryan expects big things to come from the season.

"I feel that anything less than a sectional championship is a failure," Ryan said.

His teammates agree.

"The returning [varsity players] still feel the pain of last year's tough loss in the regional championship," senior pitcher Alex Gould said. "We are working extra hard to regain that title and hopefully go further. We have a really good team this year, with a lot of good seniors and juniors."

Senior P Ryan Smith believes team chemistry will help them be successful.

"Our team is a very tight knit group," Smith said. "It is great to have such great chemistry so early in the season. That chemistry will prove to be what we need to be successful."

Junior infielder Dylan Lovering is looking forward to a year of learning how to play great baseball.

"This year is primarily a learning year for us juniors," Lovering said. "With so many seniors ahead of us, hopefully we can learn from them to make next years team a solid one."

Ryan outlined the team's first goal for the season.

"Coach [Gustafson] is [three] wins away from 300," Ryan said. "That's our first goal of the season, [to win those games for him]. He is a great guy, and I have really learned a lot from him over the years."

The team is well on its way to reaching that goal, currently sporting a 6-1 record.

Junior IF George Curran expressed confidence in the team.

"Our sights are set on a conference championship," Curran said. "This will be possible through our solid pitching staff, great

fielding and hitting. We have solid players at every position. By working as a team, the season will end with great result."

Other team members include: seniors John Rashid (P), Adonis Tountas (IF), John Nasshan (P), Jesse Blanco (outfield), Tom Endres (IF), Mark Schiewe (IF) and Dan Duran (OF) and juniors Steven Stock (OF), Daniel Kluss (IF), Tyler Pazik (OF), Tyler Rosell (P), Jimmy Xamplas (IF), Peter Jimenez (IF), Lorenzo Fiol (IF), Eric Jenson (C) and Collin Jaffe (IF).

The Wolves next play tomorrow at Buffalo Grove at 11 p.m.

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