

Sports

Diocesan teams looking to pay back for last year

By Richard A. Kiley

The boys of spring have returned to the diamonds with last week's opening of the 1988 high school baseball season. Diocesan teams will be looking to improve upon last year's showing — not one Catholic school advanced past the opening round of the sectionals. Two diocesan schools, Geneva DeSales and Elmira Notre Dame, failed to make the post-season.

Here is an overview of what to expect from this year's teams.

With a doubleheader sweep of Victor last weekend and a hard-fought 2-1 win over Greece Athena earlier this week, things are already looking up for Rich Pillitter's Aquinas Little Irish. AQ finished 9-13 last year — marking only the second losing season in Pillitter's 13 years of coaching at the Dewey Avenue school — after falling to second-seeded Irondequoit in the first round of sectional play.

But any team with a Mark Chapman, an All-City Catholic pick as a junior, has to be taken seriously for the league title. A third-year varsity player, Chapman is coming off a stellar season both on the mound and at the plate (.350).

"This is the end of an era at Aquinas," Pillitter said. "Mark wants to leave high school on a high note."

Chapman, who will play first base when he's not pitching, could have passed up his senior baseball season. He will be playing football at the University of Connecticut next fall, which would be enough to keep some players away from the baseball field.

Not Chapman. "It's that kind of an attitude that makes Mark the leader that he is," Pillitter said. "He really doesn't have to play."

AQ, which lost only Joe Altobelli to graduation from last year's team, is by no means a one-man team, either. The return of All-City Catholic senior Brian Monteleone (.350), who will make the switch from third base to the outfield, gives Pillitter more offensive punch. Monteleone will also see time as a pitcher.

Freddie Rogers will also make a move — from shortstop to second base — making room for Alan Schlagter, who is up from Mike Dianetti's JV team. Third baseman Paul Kucewicz rounds out the infield, which Pillitter hopes can cut down on the costly errors that hurt the team last year.

Pitcher-outfielder Jim Schrader (4-2, 3.10 ERA) and Todd Moore give Aquinas the

added pitching necessary to win consistently. Moore was the leading pitcher on the junior varsity last season. Eric Knapp, a senior hurler, will also be counted on as a stopper. This is Knapp's third year on the varsity.

For the first time in 17 years, Carm Urzetta will not be coaching the Fighting Kings of Bishop Kearney, but a player from his 1974 sectional championship team will be at the helm. Art Carlisi will take over the varsity Kings, who were 238-114 under Urzetta. The Kearney coaching institution stepped down after last season, which ended when Hornell upset Kearney in the post-season's opening round.

The defending City-Catholic League champions are alive and well after attending Bucky Dent's instructional baseball camp down in Delray Beach, Fla. Carlisi was impressed by his team's play in several exhibition games down south. Kearney fared well against an array of tough competition, which included Connecticut state champion Newington (near Hartford); East Hawken, Ohio; and Paramus Catholic from New Jersey.

Junior pitcher Rich Davison — who was 8-0 as a sophomore — is back as Kearney's main stopper. Carlisi is also looking for junior shortstop R.D. Long — one of the team's co-captains — to be his club's offensive catalyst. Long batted .330 last year. Senior second baseman Scott Thompson will also need to come through with the bat.

Catcher Todd Stoffel (.285), the other captain, gives the Kings stability behind the plate.

Senior Brian Rice earned the third-base spot with his play at the hot corner down in balmy Florida. Juniors Vince Falbo and Aaron Williams provide Carlisi with a good defensive and strong hitting outfield.

"If the juniors can come through, we'll be real competitive," Carlisi said. "That's the real question mark."

Question marks abound at Cardinal Mooney, where 24th-year coach Ed Nietopski lost seven starters from last year's league runner-up. Included in the graduation exodus were Mike Magans, Brian Puffer, John Mason, Greg Wachala and Paul Brescia.

Team co-captain Rob Hrankowski (.340) will need to assert himself offensively. The senior first baseman has already come through with the bat in Mooney's two wins over Geneva and Penfield. Senior cen-



C-J file photo

After last season's dismal showing in the post season, diocesan baseball teams are hoping to slide past as many opponents necessary to win sectional titles.

terfielder Dave Brescia, the Cards' other team captain, is also back with a strong bat.

Senior Scott Quinlan and junior Scott Hylas round out a better than average outfield for Mooney. Nietopski said Hylas will also be depended upon heavily on the mound.

Experience is lean in the Mooney infield with sophomore Ray Lehner at second base, but junior third baseman Charlie Sciartino (.325) and catcher Pat Corrigan (.290) saw playing time last season. Juniors Jason Terrill and Marc Chapman provide adequate backup for Corrigan.

A top newcomer on the team is junior righthander Dave Zastrow, who has pitched brilliantly in the Cards' wins over Geneva and Penfield. Zastrow has also helped himself out with the bat on several occasions already this year.

Although he's young and untested, sophomore hurler Steve Miner is a prospect Nietopski is raving about. Miner skipped the JV after pitching for the freshman team last season.

McQuaid coach Tim Jordan wants to prove his team isn't jinxed in one-run ball games. The Knights went 8-13 last season and seven of the losses were by a single run. In what turned out to be a fitting end to its season, McQuaid fell to Hilton, 4-3, in the sectionals.

Replacing graduated players like pitch-

er/third baseman Chip Golembeski (.463), Pete Kowal (.375) and pitcher/outfielder Dave Schroeder (.364) won't be easy, though. All three helped McQuaid to an overall team batting average of .286.

The return of senior Steve Wilmarth should ease the pain a little. As McQuaid's main stopper, Wilmarth pitched two two-hitters and had a near-microscopic ERA.

Senior shortstop Steve Schott is also back. According to his coach, Schott was batting near .400 until a shoulder injury hampered his hitting and his average late in the season. Senior Keith Boeck is another player Jordan is counting on for offensive production. The McQuaid outfielder already has the range and leadership skills necessary to help his teammates.

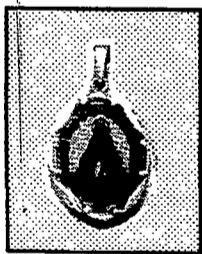
The infield is solid with the return of senior first baseman Todd Tonucci (.250) and senior third baseman Steve Peacock (.304). Sophomore catcher Sam Owens — who started for Jordan as a freshman — and pitcher/outfielder Bob Wynne are also back from last year's squad.

In addition to Wilmarth, the 20th-year coach has senior John Baxter as well as juniors Byron Schneider, Tony Lo Verdi and Kurt Schmidt making up a relatively untested pitching staff.

The puzzle may take time to come together at DeSales, where eighth-year coach Frank Payne will try to replace 10 of the 14 starters he lost from last year's 5-7 team. Payne lost his entire pitching core in Kevin Powers, Phil

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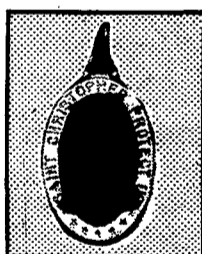
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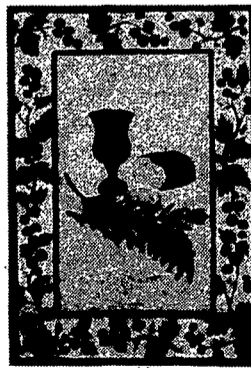
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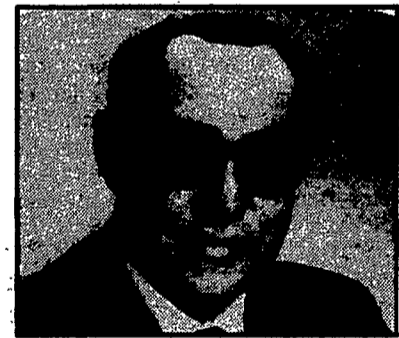


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