

# Saints credit success to coach's philosophy

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

GENEVA — In professional baseball, a dynasty usually begins because of trades for key players, or a healthy farm system, or because an owner is not afraid to spend money for needed personnel.

In the local high school scene, a baseball dynasty began with an early morning visit to the Geneva police station in 1981.

Frank Pane Sr., the former night captain for the Geneva Police Department, was on duty when Dave Pratt, who was coaching DeSales' baseball team at the time, came into the station at about 2 a.m.

Pratt said that he wouldn't be able to coach the Saints for the first few games of the season because he had to work. Pratt asked Pane — who had coached baseball at the Little League and Babe Ruth levels — if he would take his place as coach for a few games.

Pane took over the Saints the very next day. They won their first two games of the season under Pane before Pratt returned. In 1982, Pane took over as head coach.

The two games that Pane coached were perhaps a foretaste of what was to come. With Pane in charge over the next nine years, the Saints compiled an incredible 107-32 record. In his first full season as coach, DeSales advanced to the Section 5, Class C semifinals.

In 1984, the Saints won the title. Since that championship season, the Saints have added sectional titles in 1988, 1989 and 1990. They currently own a 40-game winning streak dating back to the 1988 season.

Not bad for a school which has no budget for athletic teams. In fact, the school doesn't pay salaries to its three baseball coaches — Pane, Pete French and Steve Mruczek.

According to Pane, who is now Geneva's chief of police, those factors have actually helped make the program so successful.

"The kids know that we're not getting paid," he said. "They know we're there because we love baseball and because we love DeSales."

For Pane, the two loves began early in life. A Geneva native, he played Little League and American Legion baseball. He also played in the semi-professional George Hooks Wiltsey League against such future professional baseball players as Billy Connors (currently the New York Yankees' pitching coach) and pitcher Pat Dobson.

Pane played high school ball at DeSales. During his senior year in 1960, he led the

Saints to the Wayne Finger Lakes League title.

While working for the Geneva Police Department, Pane coached Little League and Babe Ruth. When he took over the Saints in 1982, he found himself coaching a number of players he'd guided in youth baseball. Many of those players grew up in the same neighborhood, and the size of DeSales helped to foster an attitude of closeness, noted Jim Vedora, a current member of the team.

"We're all like family," Vedora remarked.

The team is "like a family" in more ways than one. In addition to coaching his two sons — Mike, who pitched from 1982 to 1986, and Frank Jr., a junior pitcher on the current squad — the eldest Pane is also the uncle to twins Jim and Joe Vedora, their older brother Steve (graduated in 1989), Bill Sweeney (a sophomore pitcher on the team), and Ron Cecere (also a 1989 grad).

Throughout his playing career, Pane Sr. was a good defensive player who could also hit. During his first year as a head coach, he realized that he needed help with pitching. In 1983, he asked Pete French, a pitcher for DeSales rival Waterloo in the late 1950s, for help.

French, who works for the United States Post Office in Geneva, readily agreed. A veteran of semi-professional baseball, French kept up on the latest pitching trends and came in with a simple philosophy. "The biggest factor is I make them throw strikes," French said. And the way to throw strikes, he continued, is to master the mechanics.

Many of the pitchers came to the team without proper coaching, French said, so he began to work with them as freshman. Jim Vedora was one of those pitchers.

Under French, Vedora — who described himself as "wild" when he first began pitching at DeSales — learned to use more of his legs and back when he pitched. The DeSales hurler also learned to disguise his pitches, and he developed an arsenal that includes not only a fast ball and a curve ball, but also a split-fingered fast ball and a change-up.

Vedora was 9-0 this past season. He threw back-to-back no-hitters, and was the winning pitcher in the Class D sectional championship game against Canaseraga, 5-3, on June 9.

The third member of the DeSales coaching staff, Mruczek, joined the program in 1986. Although Mruczek admitted that he played little organized baseball in his youth, he had learned a great deal from



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
**Coach Frank Pane Sr.'s arrival in 1982 keyed a rise in the DeSales baseball program that in nine years has produced four sectional titles.**

working with Pane Sr. and French. Mruczek said that one attribute that has helped Pane Sr. succeed as a coach is his ability to judge a player's potential.

"I really believe we get the maximum out of our players," Pane Sr. said. He explained that he tries to discover each player's abilities, and then to place the players in situations where they can best use those abilities.

The head coach said he always tries to be fair with his players. He tells them from the beginning of the season what he thinks they can do, and he tries to make sure that each player feels as if he is part of the team.

The result of Pane's coaching techniques is good team spirit, observed Mike Bucklin, who played for the Saints from 1983 to 1986. "They're probably the ... best coaches in the whole area," he said. "They make you enjoy the game. They make you want to play."

Athletic success has also helped to encourage a sense of pride, Bucklin noted. "People look at us and say, 'They're winners.'"

Pane Sr. acknowledged pride in his ability to coach. In this year's sectional title game, for example, the coaching staff had noticed that Canaseraga's catcher didn't have a strong throwing arm so the Saints stole eight bases. The coaches also observ-

ed that the opposing pitcher came off the mound toward the first base side. The Saints bunted twice in the game — both times up the third base line — and the batters got on base each time.

It is subtle things such as those that turn good teams into winners, Pane Sr. acknowledged. And the players are aware of it.

"Our kids know that our philosophy is, 'We'll give you a chance to win,'" the head coach observed. "They know if they lose a game it's because the other team was better. It's not because the coaching will beat them."

Beating the Saints has been a problem for other teams in recent years. Next season, DeSales will try to set a Section 5 record by winning four consecutive sectional titles. The Saints are also looking to extend their winning streak.

Jim Vedora said the players want to keep the winning streak alive. He noted, however, that even if DeSales should lose, playing for the school's three coaches will have left a mark on the players — a philosophy not only about baseball, but about life.

"You gotta go out and play your hardest, even if you're losing by 10 (runs)," Vedora said. "Never stop doing your best."

## St. John Fisher plans summer basketball camp

ROCHESTER — St. John Fisher College is now accepting registrations for its summer basketball camp.

The camp, which will be led by Rochester-area high school coaches and college players, is designed for boys and girls aged eight to 18. The program will be offered in two sessions: June 25-29 and July 2-6, as well as July 9-13 and July 16-19.

Daily programs will include two hours of fundamentals and competitive play. In addition to T-shirts for all participants, coaches will present more than 60 trophies.

Cost for each two-week session is \$140.

For information or to register, call 716/385-8309.

## ND's Bennett honored

ELMIRA — Notre Dame High School's Mike Bennett has been named the Elmira Kiwanis Club's male athlete of the year.

Bennett, a junior, starred in football, basketball and baseball for Notre Dame. A fullback for the Division IV champion football team, he was named Section 4's most valuable player. In basketball, he averaged 14.9 points per game and snared 151 rebounds for the Section 4, Class C champion Crusaders. Bennett was also the No. 1 pitcher on the sectional championship baseball team.

## SPORT SHORTS



## City-Catholic League names baseball all-stars

ROCHESTER — Players from the Bishop Kearney baseball team dominated selections to the City-Catholic League all-star team, as league coaches tabbed six Kings to the squad.

Kearney infielder David Armanini, outfielders Rene Ingolia and Brian Sergeant, designated hitter Tom O'Brien, pitchers Steve Miner and Marty Alexander were all named to the Division II team. Coach Art Carliji was named coach of the year in Division II.

In addition to winning their division, the Kings also captured the league title with a perfect 10-0 mark against league rivals. Kearney (17-6) earned the second seed in the Section 5 Class AA tournament, where the Kings fell in the semifinals to Eastridge, 4-3, on June 5.

Aquinas Institute infielders Darren Diehl and Alan Schlagter, and catcher Brendan Pickett were also named to the Division II team.

McQuaid infielder Matt Palmisano as well as outfielders Brent Voci and Andy Dvonch were tabbed to the Division I all-star squad.

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We received 1 correct entry identifying Yugoslavia as the country the U.S. beat to win the men's basketball gold medal at the 1976 Olympics.

The winner was M. Barney of Rochester.

### SPORTS TRIVIA

**This week's question:**  
Nolan Ryan recently pitched his 6th no-hitter! What team did he pitch his first no-hitter against?

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Rules:**  
Each week, the Catholic Courier, in conjunction with Locker Room Sports will feature a Sports Trivia contest. All you have to do to enter is answer the question, fill in your name and address and the school you attend (if applicable), cut out the coupon and send it in to the Catholic Courier. If more than one correct entry is received, a drawing will be held and one winning entry will be drawn.  
If yours is the winning entry, you will be mailed a certificate redeemable for \$10.00 OFF any purchase of \$25.00 or more at Locker Room Sports, 560 W. Ridge Rd.  
All entries must be received within seven days of this paper's issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

**The Catholic Courier  
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