

Season: Bristol rides pitching into post-season action

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through it all, the Zone One championship was another impressive benchmark for the squad.

Post 2's strength has been its pitching and Bristol has an outstanding rotation at its disposal.

Craig Lejeune, Justin Tacinelli, Matt Niedzwiecki and Steve Chamberland have been as solid a core as you'll find in the state while Tyler Cyr, Josh Kimball and closer Mike Methot all made contributions on the mound.

But one major change this season has been the coaching staff as first-year coach Dave Nocera and first-year assistants Jamie Bukowski and Matt Hackney – along with veteran assistant coach Jeff Fruchtenicht – all have performed admirably in what turned out to be one of the most intense and dramatic Legion baseball seasons on record.

This coaching staff provided not just great leadership but guidance during an extremely busy 2010 schedule.

"The coaching staff has great chemistry," said Nocera. "I thought we blended well early on in the season. We all have our strengths which, when you put them together, it really helps the kids tremendously."

Hackney was an all-state catcher from Bristol Central and during the middle part of the decade and was a critical member of the Bristol Legion squad during his stint as a player.

He moved on to Western New England College and eventually spent three years in various independent baseball leagues.

In 162 career games, Hackney batted .217 with three home runs and 40 RBI with those independents.

Currently playing for the Bristol Merchants of the

Greater Hartford Twilight League, his experience as a catcher has been invaluable to Post 2 this season.

"When you look at Hackney for example, because he was such a good player for such a long period of time, he is very good at communicating the mechanical aspects of the game," said Nocera. "He's able to teach it so he adds value there. He's obviously our pitching coach and being a long time catcher, that helps us."

Bukowski is a former coach of the Plainville's Legion baseball program and is also a veteran of the Bristol Merchants.

He also fit seamlessly with Bristol's squad and was another respected leader the players often turned to.

"Jamie is a defensive guru," said Nocera. "He really understands how the infield works so he adds value there. And obviously he has head coaching experience, which certainly

helps me."

And Nocera's first season at the helm was also a complete success.

With a wealth of baseball knowledge, Nocera knew where to put all the pieces for optimum efficiency this season.

"My value is really (being) a strategic coach," said Nocera. "I understand how to manage a game (and) I understand how to motivate players."

"You put all those strengths together and the three (coaches) really blend well and I think we needed to do that to get through what was a very challenging season for us."

The Legion season was even more compact this season as the state tournament is to begin earlier this year than past years.

But through it all, this group of players put it all together, understanding the bigger picture involved and will come out as a five or six seed in the upcoming state

tournament.

"The schedule was really challenging," said Nocera. "It's been a hot summer and we had to play a lot of games in a short period of time. It was a big challenge for us. To come out of this thing with a zone championship to me is a great testament to these players and I do hope the community understands that it's a big accomplishment for these kids."

"I don't want (the community) to underestimate how important winning the zone was to this team and to the demeanor of this group."

There is clearly more work to be done and Nocera

and his crew know it.

With its strong pitching staff, a deep run through the post-season is not only probable but expected.

And winning the state championship will be yet another benchmark to an even bigger goal.

"I certainly think we're positioned to win the state tournament," said Nocera. "We have as good a chance as anybody. As long as we minimize our mistakes, as long as we do the little things that are necessary to win, our pitching will carry us through the state tournament."

"It's an overall good season."

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