

Lawson State's baseball team loaded with local high school players

Paul Davis
pdavisn70@aol.com

The Lawson State Community College baseball team under second-year head coach Blake Lewis has just moved up to #20 in the latest National Junior College Athletic Association poll.

Part of the evidence that explains this remarkable success is in the stats. Lewis's team has earned a 22-7 record this year. That's a big turnaround from last year's 17-32.

Another part of the reason for his success is his recruiting. Yes, he has players on his 31 member roster from all over the south, some from as far away

as Miami and Texas. But 11 of the young men on this year's team played their high school baseball at metro area schools, with nine of them coming from strong programs in our local area.

Five are from McAdory High; four are from Pleasant Grove. He's getting his share, maybe more, of homegrown talent.

Speaking of which, it would not be inaccurate to call Blake Lewis 'Mr. Homegrown'. He grew up in Hueytown and graduated from Pleasant Grove High. His father, Gary Lewis, is the current baseball coach at Bessemer Academy. He introduced his son to Little League

when Blake was just five years old.

"Dad started me off," he recalled fondly, "coached me all the way to high school. Gave me a love for the game. My dream was to be a professional baseball player. When that didn't work out, I knew I wanted to be around it. Here I am, lucky to be a head coach of this first rate junior college program." From a distance, you can't tell him from his players. He looks that young.

It was mentioned to him that because of tough economic times several area junior colleges are having to cut back their athletic programs. Some will even be eliminating base-

ball next year. Not so Lawson State.

"Our President, Dr. Perry Ward, has no intention of dropping any of our athletic programs (men's and women's basketball, baseball and volleyball)," he declared.

"There's a major upgrade of our gym, locker rooms and weight rooms underway. This actually furthers education by attracting students and keeping athletes focused on staying eligible. This is really a great place to be."

He was not at all reluctant to talk about the other component of his team's success: hard work.

"I'm very demanding," said

the 28 year old head coach who looks barely out of college himself. "Our guys know they are going to work. I ask a lot of them. If you want to be good, you've got to work."

He paused. "And it doesn't take talent to hustle. Attitude is so important. You've got to have some purpose for being here."

He means that in the broadest sense, a commitment to be a productive member of the community, to reach out and give something back.

That's why he and his team visit UAB Children's Hospital several times in the fall. He considers those visits and the team members interaction with

the kids to be an integral part of his baseball program.

"Once they start doing this, going around to the children's rooms, giving out presents, baseballs, playing games with them, it's like Christmas coming five or six times a year," he said.

"The kids remember them. The team looks forward to it. You've got to give something back. It makes us extremely thankful for what we get to do everyday."

The Lawson State ball park is one of the top three or four such facilities in the state. Admission to home games is free. For schedule, go to www.lawsonstate.edu



PAUL DAVIS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Lawson State third baseman, Aaron Marcus, scoops up a grounder in practice before the Shelton State game on Friday, April 1. Marcus played his high school ball at Pleasant Grove.



The Lawson State baseball team which is currently ranked in the top 20 nationally of all junior colleges. They are all from local high schools, McAdory and Pleasant Grove. Kneeling: Joey Pollet, from left, Brent Butler, Seth Eagle and Matt Irwin are from McAdory; standing: Matt Alexander (Pl. Gr.), from left, Ryan Bradbury (Pl. Gr.), Head Coach Blake Lewis, Assist. Coach Louis Rojas, Aaron Marcus (Pl. Gr.), Brett Sivley (Pl. Gr.). Not pictured, Adam Lawrence, McAdory; and Assist. Coach David Cook.



Every team needs a ball boy. Ten year old Jaylin Magwood shows up for every Lawson State practice. He got his time in the batting cage before the Shelton State game on Friday.