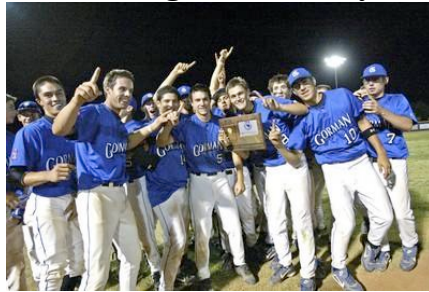


2009 High School Baseball Team Of The Year

Bishop Gorman begins and ends year at No. 1



Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas (NV)

By Nathan Rode - *Baseball America*

June 23, 2009

With his summer season underway, Bishop Gorman High (Las Vegas) head coach Chris Sheff had his squad in Hawaii to play eight games in eight days. Despite the packed schedule and obvious distractions the islands of paradise can bring, Sheff and the Gaels were plenty in tune with what was happening back on the mainland.

Moody High of Corpus Christi, Texas, was heading into the state finals against Texarkana's Texas High and eyeing its second 4-A title in three years as well as a national crown. But Texas had different ideas, scoring late and holding on for the win. That spoiled Moody's shot at the titles and helped propel Bishop Gorman into elite company.

The Gaels won 39 of their final 40 games en route to winning their fourth straight state title and claiming Baseball America's Team of the Year honors.

And it comes as no surprise to Sheff and his team.

"Absolutely we were watching," he said. "I've got a father who was a sportswriter and loves stats and writes a blog for our program. He's very involved in activities that go on around the nation. It's hard not to follow it. Then you get to it and you start rooting for teams to lose. Down the stretch after we were done we were definitely paying attention."

With five seniors committed to Division I programs, three straight state titles and a 2008 finish at No. 2 in the country, Bishop Gorman was the pick for the preseason No. 1 spot. But the Gaels didn't come out of the gate like a No. 1 team. They traveled to Scottsdale, Ariz., to play in Horizon High's Big League Dugout National Tournament. Already 0-1 after an Opening Day loss, Bishop Gorman went 1-2 over the first three days of the event.

"Obviously we got off to a slow start," Sheff said. "Almost every poll had us No. 1 in the nation and we get off to a slow start, 1-3, and people are trying to figure out what's going on. We lost a couple close ball games and weren't able to get it going. Our last game of the Horizon tournament probably was our turnaround game. We were down 7-0 and looking at going 1-4 and our offense gets rolling. We end up coming back and winning that game."

That game was against Canyon del Oro High (Oro Valley, Ariz.). Down 7-0 after three innings, Bishop Gorman put 12 runs on the board in the next three innings and held on for a thrilling victory. The Gaels returned to Nevada with a 2-3 record, but were ready to keep winning.

And win they did. They rode a 35-game win streak into the playoffs in convincing fashion. In those 35 games, Bishop Gorman outscored opponents 513-76. While 24 of those games were decided by 10 runs or more, their streak was not all about offense—it included 12 shutouts and opponents scored more than five runs just four times.

Las Vegas rival Cimarron Memorial interrupted that streak, taking Bishop Gorman down in the region championship. But there was still a way to win.

"I think the game we lost in the regional championship was as big a part of anything," Sheff said. "At that point we were in the hunt for a national championship but we knew you can't win a national without winning a state. That was a little deflating for our club. We still have a chance to win the tournament. We knew we had a play-in game the next day. My talk to the guys was we're going to win this thing. At the end no one is going to remember who wins the regional championship. Everyone is going to remember who wins the state championship."

The next day, the Gaels beat Las Vegas High and advanced to the state tournament the following week. There they took down Henderson's Green Valley High and Minden's Douglas High to set up a rematch with Cimarron. Lefthander Joey Rickard pitched 5 1/3 innings, allowing just one run on three hits before giving way to Jeff Malm, who earned the save and prompted their fourth straight dog pile.

"It's almost unreal," said Malm, who along the way matched the national record for career hits. "It's pretty incredible the run we've been able to put together. All of our hard work the past four years finally paid off. For me and our seniors this year stands out. It's our last year and we're going out on top. Not just because it's recent but because of the struggles we had to go through early in the year. We never really had to go through those the other three years."

Sheff echoed what it meant for the senior class.

"Joey and Jeff have been the centerpiece of our program for four years," he said. "Joey got the base hit to win the first state championship as a freshman and pitches us to the state championship as a senior. Our infielders, (R.J.) Santigate and (Tyler) Wagner, they played big parts. They played every day and pitched for us in big games and the playoffs. Other than Malm, (Stephen) Manthei was our guy that we relied on in big games. So the one-two punch of Malm and Manthei is really what got us there on the bump."

Only next year will reveal whether the book has closed on the Bishop Gorman dynasty. One thing is for sure: When Malm entered as a freshman and predicted they would win four straight titles he not only proved he could possibly be a prophet, but he helped start a tradition of winning that usually sticks with a program for years to come. But for now, Bishop Gorman will bask in the glory of immortality.

"It's been a great group of seniors and they're going to be sorely missed," Sheff said. "It's been a talented group of kids, a group that knows how to win, doesn't let pressure get to them. For these seniors that have been here four years, it's the perfect way to end a career by winning a national championship."