



Mustang Baseball has produced more professional players than any other Cal Poly Athletics program

# Poised for TRIUMPH

*Cal Poly Baseball Prepares Its Players for Success On and Off the Field*

BY SALLY TAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRITTANY APP

Cal Poly Baseball's stellar performance this season — including winning its first Big West Championship, achieving its first-ever No. 1 national ranking in the Division I era, and playing in the NCAA Regionals — has certainly brought the team a new level of bragging rights.

But it's a program that already had plenty to brag about, not that its even-keeled coaches or players generally would. The team has racked up its share of All Big West and All American players, playoff berths and record-setting winning seasons.

Another measure of the program's success: It's produced more professional players than any other Cal Poly Athletics program.

Under Larry Lee, head coach for the last 12 years, 47 players have signed professional contracts. Over the last nine years, 12 have gone in the first five draft rounds.

This year, there are five former Mustangs in the major leagues — Casey Fien (Minnesota Twins), Brent Morel (Pittsburgh Pirates), Bud Norris (Baltimore Orioles), Evan Reed (Detroit Tigers) and Logan Schafer

(Milwaukee Brewers) — and 20 in the minor leagues. Garrett Olson played for the Orioles, Pirates, Seattle Mariners and New York Mets before becoming a free agent last year.

Cal Poly doesn't have the recruiting power to draw top young talent like a UCLA or Oregon. So what's behind the success? A measured approach to recruiting players who will be a good fit for the program, to start, plus a strong developmental program in which players can learn and hone their skills.

There's also a focus on preparing players mentally, as well as physically, to compete.

"Most professional organizations like to draft our players because they are mature," Lee said. "They are ready to compete and be successful at that level."

That focus is part of a deeper philosophy reflecting Cal Poly's approach of preparing students for success, whether it's in professional baseball or any other career.

"There were so many life lessons I learned traveling and playing in the Big West," Norris, a pitcher who played for the Mustangs from 2004-06, reflected while at Baggett Stadium for the alumni game in February. "It really helped me grow into the man I am today, and it prepared me for life after college."

Those life lessons are reinforced on and off the field. Players have to perform in the classroom as well as on the diamond, keep strict study hall hours, and meet the same demanding academic expectations of their non-athlete peers.

They're also responsible for helping maintain the school's baseball facilities, grooming the field, cleaning the locker room, and such. Through all this, Lee and his coaching staff work to instill traits such as sacrifice, discipline, hard work, self-motivation and accountability.

"Those are the lessons you are trying to teach, qualities that will help them become good community members, good husbands, good fathers," he said. "Bottom line, that's much more important than any wins and losses that will transpire in their time here."

As Brewers outfielder Schafer sees it, the Cal Poly baseball program "shapes you as a person before it does as a ball player."

"We have a lot of stuff that we learn when we're here, especially how to work together as a team and pick each other up," said Schafer, a Mustang in 2007 and

2008 who also played in the alumni game. "You learn how to be a better person regardless of what you end up doing in life."

That's critical, Athletic Director Don Oberhelman said, because all the players are going to go professional in something besides baseball eventually.

Oberhelman takes pride in what the program has achieved while still maintaining Cal Poly's rigorous academic standards.

"There's the admission standards, the way they have to compete in the classroom, how seriously you have to take your education," he said. "We're proving that smart guys can play good baseball."

To him, Cal Poly Athletics programs are a great complement to the school's Learn By Doing ethos.

"Our student-athletes are out there in a hands-on learning lab of leadership, group dynamics, competition, work ethic and integrity," Oberhelman said. "The lessons they learn through the supplemental education of baseball and their professor, Coach Lee, are going to be keys to their success later in life."

Mustang student-athletes are expected to maintain excellence in the classroom as well as on the field

