

Young Stars Make LSU A Threat To Win CWS

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Alex Bregman had already made up his mind to turn down the Boston Red Sox and instead enroll at LSU as he watched upstart Stony Brook celebrate a College World Series berth following their upset of the Tigers in Baton Rouge last year.

The next day, Bregman logged on to the social media site Twitter and guaranteed the Tigers would get to Omaha in 2013, when he would be their new shortstop.

"I knew I would be able to make a difference and expected I could do even more than I've done so far," said Bregman, recently named the national freshman hitter of the year by the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association and All-America by Baseball America. "I'm just happy we're in Omaha and that's the main reason I came to school. I just wanted to win a national championship."

Thanks to a foundation of youth that includes players like Bregman, freshman outfielder Mark Laird and the sophomore ace of the pitching staff, Aaron Nola, LSU (57-9) will be among the favorites in Omaha after tying a school record for wins. The Tigers open play on Sunday against UCLA, and the so-far unbeatable Nola (12-0), will be on the mound.

Mason Katz is among the four-year seniors who would have comprised the first class since 1982 not to make at least one trip to Omaha during their

LSU careers had the Tigers not made it this year. Katz is quick to give credit to rise of younger players.

"Those were pieces we were missing from last year," Katz said.

Nola was 7-4 as a freshman. This season, he has been arguably the best pitcher in college baseball, not losing a game in the formidable Southeastern Conference, then going 2-0 so far in the NCAA tournament.

While Nola's fastball can reach the low- to mid-90s, he does not have to try to overpower hitters because he is seemingly able to put his fastball, breaking ball and off-speed pitches wherever he wants.

But what also impresses Nola's coaches and teammates is the hurler's

unshakable confidence and mental toughness.

For coach Paul Mainieri, one of Nola's defining moments came in the NCAA regional round, when three errors committed behind him allowed Sam Houston a five-run first inning. Nola responded with six shutout innings as LSU roared back.

In the super regional, Nola went head-to-head against Oklahoma ace Jonathan Gray, the third overall pick in the draft. He pitched a two-hit shutout in a 2-0 win — and Katz will never forget a brief conversation he had with Nola in the tunnel behind the dugout

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JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D
Yankton Black Sox pitcher Levi Schmidt sends the ball home during the opening game of a VFW Teener baseball doubleheader with Sioux Falls Central on Wednesday at Yankton's Riverside Field. Results from the twinbill were not available at presstime.

East Holds Off Yankton Post 12

Baseball: Yankton Junior Legion Splits With Tabor

SIoux FALLS — Sioux Falls East held off a late Yankton rally to score a 5-4 victory over First Dakota Post 12 in American Legion baseball action on Wednesday.

Yankton scored in the first, but East scored two runs in the sixth and three in the seventh to take a 5-2 lead. Post 12 scored two runs in the top of the ninth, but could not complete the rally.

Justin Miller led East with two hits. Matt White added a double.

Mitch Gullikson had three hits and two runs scored, and Andrew Hummel, Lane Sawatzke and Austin Johnson each had two hits for Yankton, which outhit East 13-7. Hummel had a triple and two RBI, and Sawatzke doubled for Post 12. Brad Ulmer, Kaleb Bromley, Sam Wendte, Zach Benjamin and Will Steward also had hits.

Justin Underwood picked up the win in relief. Gullikson took the loss, also in relief.

Yankton, 4-4, travels to the Spearfish Tournament this weekend.

Yankton Juniors 7-2, Tabor 5-5

TABOR — The Yankton Post 12 junior squad split a doubleheader with Tabor on Wednesday in American Legion baseball action. Yankton took the opener 7-5, with Tabor claiming the nightcap 5-2.

In the opener, Yankton scored the game's final five runs to claim victory.

Tabor jumped off to an early lead thanks to a five-run first inning, keyed by a Chase Kortan home run.

Mitch Mueller went 2-4 with a two-run double that put Yankton ahead for good. Alex Crandall had a hit and a RBI. Adam Walter, Brady Hale, Greg Hauer and Ben Cameron added hits in the win.

Hauer picked up the win in relief of Cameron, who pitched the first three innings.

Hale had two hits and three stolen bases for Yankton in the nightcap. Cameron added a hit.

Walter took the loss.

Yankton's junior Legion squad travels to South Sioux City, Neb., for a doubleheader today (Thursday). Start time is 6 p.m.

VFW Teener

Lakers 4-5, S.F. East 1-6

SIoux FALLS — The Yankton Lakers split with Sioux Falls East in VFW Teener baseball action on Wednesday in Sioux Falls, winning the opener 4-1 before dropping the nightcap 6-5.

In the opener, Tyler Strahl and Chase Vogt each had two hits for Yankton, with Strahl driving in a run and Vogt scoring a run. Nate Stephenson and Drew Wenande each had hits, with Stephenson scoring a run. Nathan Hein had a run scored and a RBI in the victory.

Michael Heine picked up the win.

In the nightcap, Stephenson and Strahl each had two hits, with Stephenson also scoring a run. Heine had a hit and two runs scored. Hunter Cameron had a hit and a run scored. Vogt and Wenande each scored runs for the Lakers.

Jordan Payer took the loss.

The Lakers, 7-4, host the Bob Deery Classic this weekend at Riverside Field. Play begins at 10 a.m. on Friday with the Lakers facing Sioux Falls Central.

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Basketball | Work Begins For 2013-14



JEREMY HOECK/P&D
Yankton boys' basketball coach Chris Haynes talks to his team during the Mount Marty College boys' basketball team camp on Wednesday at Laddie E. Cimpr Arena. The Bucks are one of many teams getting some extra off-season work in the camp, which continues today at Cimpr and the Summit Center.

Game Experience Helps Prepare Teams For Season



JEREMY HOECK/P&D
Yankton's Evan Greeneway, center, defends a Sheldon, Iowa player during their game Wednesday afternoon at Mount Marty's team camp at Laddie E. Cimpr Arena.

BY JEREMY HOECK
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There will be time for relaxation, but the Yankton Bucks basketball team is all business this summer.

Three months removed from a Region 1AA final loss at Brookings and six months before their season starts in December, the Bucks are working on certain aspects of their game through team camps this summer.

Yankton, 5-13 last season under first-year coach Chris Haynes, is one of 16 teams to compete in the Mount Marty College Lancer Boys' Camp, which began Wednesday and continues today (Thursday). The camp is being held at Laddie E. Cimpr Arena, with additional games at the Summit Center.

"We said at the end of our region game that we didn't lose that game on March 5, we lost it in the 364 days before that game," Haynes said after his team played Sheldon, Iowa, on Wednesday afternoon. "We wanted to make sure that doesn't happen again."

With that goal in mind, the Bucks — like many other area teams — are taking advantage of a state rule. South Dakota

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CHRIS HAYNES, YHS BOYS' B-BALL COACH

allows coaches to have four out-of-season contacts, from the end of the state track meet through midnight of July 31.

The Bucks' camp, held May 28-31, served as their first contact, while the Mount Marty camp is the second. Yankton will also compete at a University of South Dakota and South Dakota Mines camp later this summer, both which have varsity and JV action. The Bucks will also play in a varsity-only Centerville camp.

Rather than just holding shoot-arounds or impromptu workouts, a camp atmosphere is beneficial because of the new competition, according to Ryan Olson, who will be a senior this fall for the Bucks.

"It's actual game experience. These give us a real feel for where we're at," Olson said. "It's a chance to get up and down the floor, and not

just running drills or shooting together."

Offense was a major focal point this summer for the Bucks, said senior-to-be J.J. Hejna.

"You can definitely see the little things here," he said. "We needed to work on that side of the floor more. Haynes always talks about defense, but we all knew we had a hard time scoring."

In three games — with 18-minute halves and a running clock — Wednesday, Yankton played Parkston, Dell Rapids and Sheldon, and scored at least 60 points in all three, Hejna said.

Even with four fewer minutes and fewer possessions during the season, the Bucks scored 60 points just once last season.

On the idea of attending four camps during the summer, Hejna said he

Kansas City Teen Throws Out Ceremonial First Pitch From 1,800 Miles Away

Robot Allows Ill A's Fan To Make Toss

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — From some 1,800 miles away in Kansas City, Mo., 13-year-old Nick LeGrande threw out the ceremonial first pitch before the Yankees-Athletics game Wednesday night.

Into the glove of A's reliever Ryan Cook, in Oakland. It was all made possible by a telerobotic pitching machine, and is believed to be a baseball first when it comes to ceremonial first pitches.

A first pitch from across the country — a neat new concept, indeed.

LeGrande is an A's fan with a rare blood disorder called severe aplastic anemia, and the former Little Leaguer's illness no longer allows him to attend games.

"That a boy, Nick, pretty good arm there, bud," Cook said. "Congratulations, bud, you're in the big leagues."

LeGrande and his family, including parents Mike and Shari, were taken to a mini baseball stadium. It

was constructed by Google at its Kansas City offices — a location close to LeGrande's home and Children's Mercy Hospital, where he receives treatment. Nick's friends, doctors and former teammates were all set to be in attendance.

At the same in the Bay Area, a telerobotic pitching machine was placed on the pitcher's mound at the Oakland Coliseum to follow the teen's movements. The technology allowed LeGrande to simultaneously throw the pitch and watch it happen from afar.

"Unbelievable," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Hopefully it makes his day a good day. We're all for it. It should be interesting. ... I've never seen it before. I'm interested to see how it goes. It's pretty cool in that it gets to be done from somewhere else for someone who can't be here and who apparently is an A's fan."

In explaining the process, Google said that LeGrande would use an Android application allowing

him to control the movements of the robot in Oakland. That robot was equipped with a camera, livestreaming a view of the ballpark to LeGrande in Kansas City.

A video about LeGrande's life was shown on the two main scoreboards before the first pitch, which was then shown live from Kansas City on the two big screens.

This all came together in part through the efforts of Cook, whose girlfriend's sister works for an advertising agency connected with Google. Oakland officials don't know of any time this has been done before.

Cook caught the pitch after standing behind the plate to watch the video tribute, and saying, "That's some pretty powerful stuff." He then introduced "Nick, in his major league debut." Cook encouraged everyone to consider becoming bone marrow donors.

Fans cheered and jumped to their feet as the right-hander threw his pitch. Cook then told the teen he would have a ball signed by all

of the A's to present to LeGrande when the team travels to Kansas City from July 5-7.

"I thought it would be an amazing thing to be a part of, to make somebody's dream come true," Cook said before the game. "And once it came to me, I started at the bottom of the ladder here at the clubhouse and took it to the Athletics and hoped they'd be supportive of it. We got nothing but support all the way up, and from there it was pretty seamless and easy for me. I just sat back and let it all transpire."

There is even a Twitter hash tag of NicksFirstPitch. LeGrande's special pitch also will be chronicled on his Google Web site: <http://fiber.google.com/about/nicks-firstpitch/>.

A post from Wednesday read: "Meet 13-year-old baseball fanatic Nick LeGrande. His big league dreams were put on hold when he was diagnosed with severe aplastic anemia, a life-threatening blood disorder. Tonight, he'll make his triumphant return to the game."

Dodgers, D-Backs To Open '14 In Australia

NEW YORK (AP) — The Los Angeles Dodgers and Arizona Diamondbacks will bring their thunder Down Under.

Major League Baseball will open the 2014 regular season in Australia, with the Dodgers and Diamondbacks playing a two-game series at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

The matchups March 22-23 mark baseball's first games in Australia that count.

"It's going to be fantastic," Aussie-born Dodgers reliever Peter Moylan said Wednesday. "I've been trying to preach the game back in Australia for years."

MLB and the players' union announced the international opening day just one day after Los Angeles and Arizona mixed it up in a big brawl at Dodger Stadium. The Diamondbacks and Dodgers already had a testy relationship before this

scrape that resulted in six ejections.

"I always wanted to go to Australia," Dodgers slugger Matt Kemp said. "Now I got a real reason to go and I get to play baseball."

Baseball opened its season at Tokyo in 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012. The 1999 opener was held at Monterrey, Mexico, and the 2001 season began in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The rest of the big league season next year is slated to resume on March 30.

The Dodgers-Diamondbacks opener will come 100 years after the Chicago White Sox and New York Giants played exhibition games at the same cricket venue. On Jan. 2, 1914, the White Sox beat the Giants 5-4 before an estimated 10,000 fans.

There also was an exhibition baseball game at the same site in December 1888 featuring Spalding's World Tourists.