

Tribal member one of state’s best baseball players

Christian Cooney heading to University of Portland

By Danielle Frost
Smoke Signals staff writer

Special. Gifted. Solid work ethic. This is how those who know Christian Cooney describe the 18-year-old baseball player who will be competing at the Division I level next year for the University of Portland Pilots.

Cooney, a Grand Ronde Tribal member, capped his final high school baseball season at Portland’s Central Catholic High School by being named one of the top 6A players in the state. He’s known for his quick hands and feet, and ability to pitch, catch and throw with supreme skill.

“He’s got all of the intangibles of a great baseball player and will definitely make an impact at the college level,” says Central Catholic Head Baseball Coach Brian Grant. “He trains hard both on and off the field, puts his time in the weight room, and delivers a solid work ethic wherever he goes.”

The 6-foot-3-inch, 200-pound Cooney was recently named a high school baseball leader for 2019 by *The Oregonian* newspaper. The rankings are based on batting average, on-base percentage, home runs, triples, doubles, RBIs, stolen bases, wins, ERA, strikeouts and WHIP.



Central Catholic’s Christian Cooney slides home for a run scored during the 2019 baseball season.

And his statistics for the year back up his selection: .430 batting average, .526 on-base percentage and four homers.

Grant has known Cooney since he was a freshman, first as a pitching coach and then as the head baseball coach. Although Central Catholic ultimately lost the state championship to rival Jesuit in an exciting 13-inning final game, Grant was extremely proud of his team and Cooney.

“I know he has aspirations to play professional baseball and I really think he has a chance,” he says. “I played at that level and know what

it looks like.”

Cooney is the son of Tribal member Tom Cooney and Pamela Graham of Portland. He has played baseball “as long as I can remember.”

“I’ve always been active and pretty much played sports year-round since I was a kid,” he says. “After my junior year, I just focused on baseball though. I love the sport.”

Cooney plays center field, as well as being a right-handed closer on the mound. As far as baseball accolades go, he credits both a combination of his passion for the sport coupled with a strong competitive streak.

“I am always trying to be better,”

he says. “Every year I try to improve on the year before and just be the best baseball player I can be.”

Cooney says he loves both playing baseball and the family feeling of being on a team.

“It’s been a great group of guys,” he says. “I’ve played football and basketball, but baseball is where I have always felt the most welcome.”

Cooney’s work ethic in sports also extends to the classroom, where he was a top student in high school with a 3.7 GPA.

“He’s just a great kid,” says Tom Cooney. “I couldn’t ask for a better one. I knew if he really applied himself in baseball he would go out with a bang. He worked his butt off and I’m very proud of him.”

Cooney accepted an offer to play at the University of Portland because it is the alma mater of his mother and grandfather, close to home and because he really connected with the baseball program.

“It felt like the players really cared about each other,” he says.

Cooney says he is undecided on a college major, but is interested in potentially working in the field of criminology, sports medicine or marketing.

He may be unsure of his future, but those who know him agree it will be bright.

“Little kids will come up and ask for Christian’s autograph and I tell them they might want to keep that because this kid really has a good chance,” Grant says. ■

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Cassandra Rhamey is available to assist with recertification and applications for the Oregon Health Plan. She can be reached at 503-879-1359 or cassandra.rhamey@grandronde.org.

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