

Doug Sharp leads Grant Union baseball into new season

Team hosts two tourneys next two weekends

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

Doug Sharp has a long history with Grant Union's baseball program and is taking over the reins as Prospector head coach this season.

Sharp, a math teacher at the school, played baseball for the Prospectors in his high school days, and he was head coach in 2006 and 2007 and assistant coach for the past two years for former head coach Dusty Williams.

Twenty-five baseball players are busy at the batting cages and Malone Field at the Seventh Street Complex, Grant Union combining with Prairie City this season.

Sharp said he hopes to return the team to a tradition of success.

"We never want to be rebuilding, but reloading," he said. "We're trying to get that back."

He said his goal is to make sure the team is fundamentally sound and to teach the little things about the game that will gain victories.

"You want to play consistent baseball and wait for the other team to make mistakes," he said.

It's also important to anticipate each play — and hustle, he said.

As coach, he's trying to lead by example.

"You want to be contagious with your own effort and attitude," he said. "If I'm hustling and working hard, they know they need to work hard."

He said his athletes are showing commitment to the team, putting in the hours at practice.

Sharp's assistant coaches include RC Huerta, Zack Deiter and Brandon Hueckman.

Hueckman, a 2003 Grant Union graduate, was on the team that made it to the state championship game his senior year.

Deiter, who graduated last June, was Grant Union's starting pitcher and left "big shoes to fill," Sharp said.

Sharp said he appreciates his assistant coaches, adding, "You're only as good as your support staff."

This year's Prospector seniors are catcher Jacob Vaughan, first baseman Roen Langum and outfielder Gabe McKinley.



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter

Grant Union's Peyton Neault is ready to swing as the Prospectors practice at the batting cages March 14 at Seventh Street Complex in John Day.



Gabe McKinley



Jacob Vaughan



Roen Langum

Pitchers this season include sophomore Logan McCluskey, also at second, and junior Warner Robertson, also at third.

Younger pitchers in the wings include freshmen Mason Morris, Justin Hodge and Parker Neault.

Other players include junior short stop Tristan Morris, sophomore third baseman Peyton Neault, junior left fielder Russell Hodge, junior center fielder Cole Deiter and junior right fielder Damion Young.

"I think we have a lot of versatility," Sharp said, adding that if his athletes can hit the ball and stay focused, they'll play.

"Warner and Logan, they're going to give you everything they have," he said. "I just want our kids to have confidence and want them to go out there and compete."

A 2A team in Special District 7 this season, Grant Union/Prairie City will compete against: Stanfield/Echo (2A), Heppner/Ione (2A), Dufur/South Wasco County (1A), Pilot Rock/Nixyaawii/

GRANT UNION BASEBALL SCHEDULE

March 21: vs. Homedale, Idaho, 2 p.m. (Iron Triangle Tournament)

March 22: vs. Santiam Christian, 1 p.m. (Iron Triangle Tournament)

March 22: vs. Western Christian, 3 p.m. (Iron Triangle Tournament)

March 23: vs. Nestucca, 2 p.m. (Iron Triangle Tournament)

March 28: vs. Umpqua Valley Christian/Melrose Christian, 2 p.m. (Les Schwab Tournament)

March 29: vs. Neah Kah Nie, 2 p.m. (Les Schwab Tournament)

March 30: vs. Rainier, 2 p.m. (Les Schwab Tournament)

April 6: @ Dufur/South Wasco County, 12 p.m., 2 p.m.

April 9: @ Pilot Rock/Nixyaawii/Ukiah, 4 p.m.

April 14: vs. Weston-McEwen, 12 p.m., 2 p.m.

April 16: @ Heppner/Ione, 4 p.m.

April 27: vs. Sherman/Arlington/Condon, 12 p.m., 2 p.m.

April 30: vs. Pilot Rock/Nixyaawii/Ukiah, 4 p.m.

May 4: @ Union/Cove, 12 p.m., 2 p.m.

May 7: vs. Heppner/Ione, 4 p.m.

May 11: vs. Stanfield/Echo, 12 p.m., 2 p.m.

May 20: State playoffs, first round

May 22: State playoffs, second round

May 24: State playoffs, quarterfinals

May 28: State playoffs, semifinals

May 31: State playoffs, finals

Ukiah (2A), Sherman/Arlington/Condon (1A), Union/Cove (2A) and Weston-McEwen (2A).

Pilot Rock finished in second place at state last year, but Sharp said they lost pitchers to graduation.

Stanfield, which was traditionally strong at the 3A level, is now 2A, and Heppner was also competitive last year, Sharp said.

"We had to beat them (Heppner) on a walk-off bunt to advance last year," the coach said.

He added there is no district playoff this season, so every game is important.

"We want to respect every

opponent," he said.

Sharp said his former high school coach Art Thunell, who is now director of the John Day-Canyon City Parks and Recreation District, has been a "huge influence" in his life, as a coach and a teacher.

"As soon as he stepped on the field, he was 100 mph" when he coached, Sharp said.

Thunell was recognized as Oregon's "winningest" high school coach in 2005 — going 31-0 that season with 591 victories over his 28-year coaching career. He also earned the National Coach of the Year

Award in 2006 from the National Federation of State High School Associations.

Vaughan, excited to start the season, said he enjoys the methodical and strategical aspect of baseball and said they have some big hitters on the team this year.

Langum is impressed with the team chemistry.

"We're going to have good communication in game, and we're going to pick each other up — nobody gets down," he said.

McKinley said he feels they have a high chance of making it further in the playoffs this season. Last year, Grant Union made it to the first round at state.

He's happy with the good relationship between the players and coaches this year.

"The new coach is involved with the players and has a lot of experience," he said. "He's been involved with the program a lot, and he wants to see it come back."

Sharp said, if you try to offer kids a program that they can be proud of, they don't mind putting in the long hours.

"They want to be the next group that wants to carry on the torch — that's our goal," he said.

He said they're aiming for a state championship.

"Why play the game if we're not going for a state championship?" he asked. "We'll do our best, and whatever happens, happens."

SPORTS SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

Grant Union track and field, inter-squad meet in John Day, 4 p.m.

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

Grant Union golf @ Heppner at

Echo Hills Golf Course, 10 a.m.

Grant Union baseball vs. Santiam Christian (Iron Triangle Tournament), 1 p.m.

Grant Union baseball vs. Western Christian (Iron Triangle Tournament), 3 p.m.

ment), 3 p.m.

Grant Union softball @ Lost River at Pilot Rock Tournament, 5 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

Grant Union softball @ Pilot Rock

Tournament vs. TBD, 1 p.m.

Grant Union baseball vs. Nestucca (Iron Triangle Tournament), 2 p.m.

MONDAY, MARCH 25

Grant Union softball vs. Clats-

kanie (Grant Union Spring Break Tournament), 1 p.m.

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

Grant Union softball vs. Nestucca (Grant Union Spring Break Tournament), 1 p.m.

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