

Lake Norman Citizen

Former SouthLake baseball star looks to teach fundamentals, uplift players

By dcoats@lakenormanpublications.com on September 09, 2020

by Doug Coats



Nathan Sharp has turned his baseball summer camp into full-time academy this year. /Courtesy of Soaring Eagles

HUNTERSVILLE – A championship-winning duo has teamed up again to teach fundamentals to young baseball players around the Lake Norman area.

Nathan Sharp this year expanded his Soaring Eagles baseball camp to a full-time academy after six years as a summer gig. The 27-year-old SouthLake Christian grad was part of the Eagles' state championship team in 2011, and now instructs players ages 5-12. The former shortstop was named this paper's 2010 Lake Norman Area Player of the Year.

His high school coach, Rich Landis, has returned to the lake area after a brief stint in Raleigh and serves as the veteran instructor at Soaring Eagles. He was SouthLake's first athletic director, baseball coach, football coach and what Sharp calls "the disciplinarian."

"Growing up, you don't realize how much a coach impacts you for the day to day life," Sharp said. "You think he's the coolest, think he knows everything. Coach Landis, I got lucky with him, because he knows quite a bit, whether it's baseball or his walk with God through life."

After his decorated high school career, Sharp played one season at Presbyterian College before injuring his ankle. When he returned to his Mooresville home that summer, he was searching for a way to earn some money, but knew that playing summer ball at night meant he couldn't work as a server at a restaurant.

That's how Soaring Eagles was born.

"There's a need in this area for passionate coaches that are enthusiastic and also uplifting," Sharp said. "Coaches have had a huge impact on me. And that confidence is something I want to pass on to kids that I interact with."

The first Soaring Eagles baseball camp in 2012 had 10 kids each week. The goal was to create an avenue for kids to improve their fundamental skills in an environment that is both competitive and instructional, but Sharp also wanted to teach life lessons to his campers. His experience at SouthLake and faith-based Stewards of the Game provided a foundation for that philosophy.

"I've always got to get the best out of myself on a baseball field," said Sharp. "That's something I've carried throughout my life. Kids on the baseball field are vulnerable. They're dealing with complexities of life, failure and relationships with teammates and opponents. Character building goes hand in hand with teaching baseball fundamentals. It makes for the two to go together."

Sharp himself has his own redemption story, after taking a break from the game after his freshman year. He was at Fenway Park in 2015, watching his favorite player Derek Jeter's final game.

"I told my dad, 'How is he doing this at 41 years old?'" he explained "This is unbelievable. He said 'You're 22 years old, you could go out there and do it again. Something in my brain, said 'think so?'"

After emailing several Division 3 coaches, Sharp finished his career at Lynchburg College, where he posted a .316 batting average and was third on the team in runs scored.

To Landis, his former all-state infielder is the perfect fit in his new role as instructor and advisor.

"I've been so impressed, not because he was one of my better baseball players, but just a great guy," Landis said. "I've been to a ton of camps, colleges. Just the authenticity with how Nathan does camps, the genuine care for the kids is first and foremost. It's just neat to see. It's great he's giving it a go to make it a year-round business."

Part of the off-the-field aspect involves academy instructors leading daily devotionals. And then there's the hug rule: Sharp insists that the campers hug their parents upon leaving their cars each day.

"They see big coach Nathan and they're a little intimidated, and they see (another player) hug his mom," Sharp said. "It just kind of eases everything and starts it out on the right foot. The parents absolutely love it. Any excuse to get their kid to hug them is gold. It starts the day out right."

With campers in the age we're it's usually "too cool" to show affection, Sharp said some are reluctant.

"They're like 'Aw coach, come on!' But You're never too old to hug your mom," he said.

Though he's gone full time with Soaring Eagles after spending six months in sales at Red Ventures, Sharp has been using baseball facilities at Huntersville Athletic Park and North Mecklenburg Park. He said one day he might be able to get his own property.

"It does get cold in the winter," he said. "So maybe somewhere down the line, if that's where God wants me to go with it, as far as facilities, then awesome, but not sure what his plans are for me yet."

This summer the staff has been all former Eagles, with SouthLake grads Joe and Josh Haney – now both Division 1 players – joining Landis. Sessions were previously capped at 24 campers, but with COVID-19 limiting outdoor gathering to 25, there were 21 plus the four instructors.

It's even been a family affair at times. Sharp's mother has led yoga for the young campers.

"The kids end up enjoying it at the end," Sharp said.