

CHARLOTTE OBSERVER: May 19, 2010

Athlete of the Week

NATHAN SHARP, SOUTHLAKE BASEBALL

Shortstop Leads Southlake Deep Into the State Playoffs

By Sergio Tovar

Nathan Sharp's offensive numbers have been off the charts this season.

"This is definitely one of the best seasons I've ever played," the junior said. "I've been hitting pretty well." That could be an understatement.

The shortstop led his Southlake team with 55 runs and 58 RBIs, while hitting .570 going into last weekend's state semifinals. He had the most at-bats on the team - 107 – so his batting average is no fluke.

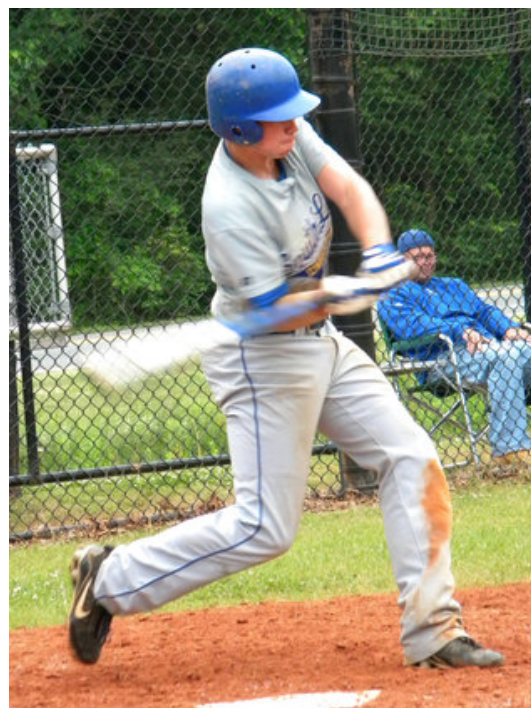
Sharp was also second in homeruns for the Eagles, with 15.

Even with a short home field - at 300-feet all-around - that allowed him to hit so many homers, Sharp is a powerful and efficient hitter.

His highlight of the season was hitting a home run over a deep center field fence at Hickory Grove - 360 feet away.

Sharp explained that hitting his first grand slam this year was also exciting. The 17-year-old said that he's surpassed the goals he set for himself before the season. "I just wanted to hit the ball hard and I've come out and performed better than I ever thought," he said.

Southlake baseball coach Rich Landis said that this success has a lot to do with Sharp's awareness of the strike zone. "He knows it better than many kids that I've seen, and I've been around a lot of them," said Landis. "Even if he goes deep in the count, he has a good idea of the zone and will put it in play somewhere."



Junior shortstop Nathan Sharp's powerful bat has been in exhibit this season. Sharp had 58 RBIs and 15 homeruns before the NCISAA 2A baseball final four.

The Sharp File

This is what Southlake Christian junior Nathan Sharp prefers:

Pitcher or shortstop? Shortstop.

Fastball or curve ball? Fastball.

Homerun or game-winning RBI? Winning RBI.

Grand slam or no-hitter? No-hitter.

Baseball or swimming? Baseball

Sharp consistently extends his at-bats until he's able to get the pitch he wants – the one that will best help him get on base. "I've had a lot of experience – playing for as long as I remember, so I know what pitches to swing at and what pitches I should take," said Sharp.

That awareness comes in part from Sharp's pitching experience. "He knows not only the strike zone, but he also knows the umpires - if they have a broad zone that day, he knows he better be aggressive, but if the umpire has a small zone, he knows he gets to be more selective," said Landis.

Sharp - who is 6-0, 185-pounds - was 5-0 on the mound before tendonitis on his right elbow forced him to put off pitching more than a month ago. Last week, Sharp was back to pitching form.



Landis said his star player's consistency comes from the amount of time he's put into improving as a ball player. "It's a matter of all that work he's put in through the years," said Landis. In addition to staying after practice and hitting what he called "buckets and buckets" of balls, Sharp often spends his weekends working on his in-fielding and pitching as well as hitting more balls with his father, Mike, who played baseball at Davidson College.

Landis explained that in addition to bringing consistency and a good work ethic to his team, Sharp is also a team leader respected by his peers. "He's just a good role model, especially for the young guys around," said Landis. Sharp, who is very vocal on the field, said he learned how to be a leader from past players. "I love the game, and that's what it comes with - yelling and encouraging my teammates," the Huntersville native said.

Sharp, who also swims at Southlake, said winning both the MAC regular baseball season and conference titles was a big accomplishment for him and his fellow Eagles.

"That was awesome."

Read more: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/05/19/1435703/shortstop-leads-southlake-deep.html#ixzz0oNPtZho0>