

SPORTS

CAROLINA WEEKLY NEWSPAPER GROUP'S

2010 BASEBALL SUPER TEAM

FIRST TEAM

NAME	SCHOOL	CLASS	POSITION
Brett Austin	Providence	Junior	Catcher
Jake Fincher	Providence	Junior	Infielder
Lee Harrison	Charlotte Country Day	Junior	Pitcher
Kyle Himler	Hopewell	Senior	Outfielder
Mikal Hill	Mallard Creek	Junior	Infielder
Brian Holberton	Myers Park	Senior	Catcher
Alex Jensen	Charlotte Catholic	Junior	Infielder
Ty Linton	Charlotte Christian	Senior	Outfielder
Hunter May	Hopewell	Senior	Pitcher
Jack Reinheimer	Ardrey Kell	Senior	Infielder
Logan Ratledge	Ardrey Kell	Junior	Infielder
Nathan Sharp	SouthLake Christian	Junior	Infielder
Cody Starnes	Independence	Senior	Catcher
Jake Watson	Charlotte Christian	Senior	Infielder
Nick McGee	West Mecklenburg	Junior	Catcher

LAKE NORMAN-AREA
PLAYER OF THE YEAR:
Nathan Sharp, SouthLake Christian

LAKE NORMAN-AREA
COACH OF THE YEAR:
Chet Greeson, Hopewell

MECKLENBURG COUNTY
PLAYER OF THE YEAR:
Mikal Hill, Mallard Creek

MECKLENBURG COUNTY
COACH OF THE YEAR:
John Tuscan, South Mecklenburg

SECOND TEAM

Nick Agwaral, Charlotte Christian; **Jackson Campana**, Providence;
Hunter Conley, Hopewell; **Caleb Cunninham**, South Mecklenburg;
Leighton Daniels, East Mecklenburg; **Grant Fisher**, Myers Park;
Jared Fortune, SouthLake Christian; **Sam Fulginiti**, Charlotte Christian;
Olen Little, East Mecklenburg; **Ashton Lover**, Ardrey Kell;
Collin Manning, Charlotte Catholic; **Matt Metzger**, Providence Day;
Kirk Morgan, Mallard Creek; **Andrew Pope**, Providence Day;
Daniel Stewart, Charlotte Catholic

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SHARP EMERGES
FROM THE SHADOWS

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Chris Hunt/Herald photo

SouthLake Christian Academy's Nathan Sharp is
Carolina Weekly Newspaper Group's 2010
Lake Norman-Area Baseball Player of the Year.

BASEBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR

SouthLake's Sharp emerges as a big-time hitter

by Chris Hunt
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Baseball players have a history of court-ing superstitions, and SouthLake Christian Academy slugger Nathan Sharp is no different.

Sharp's batting average is so important to him; he doesn't want to know what it is during the season. The junior shortstop is afraid that if he finds out his batting average, it might affect his approach at the plate. If the number is too high, he's worried it might inflate his ego, and he'll take his success for granted. If it's too low, his confidence will dip, and pitchers will pick him apart.

The theory sounds a little ridiculous, but to paraphrase Crash Davis in the classic baseball movie "Bull Durham," if you believe you are hitting well because of something you're doing, then you are hitting well because of what your doing.

That longtime baseball theory is certainly working for Sharp. During the 2010 season he hit .565 and earned N.C. Independent Schools Athletic Association 2A All-State honors.

He also is Carolina Weekly Newspaper Group's 2010 Lake Norman-Area Baseball Player of the Year.

Remaining oblivious to one's batting average; however, isn't as easy as it sounds. Sometimes people couldn't wait until the end of the season to tell Sharp how well he was hitting. Making matters more difficult was the fact that Sharp's father, Mike, is the Eagles' statistician. Needless to say, hints about his batting average were always looming

around the corner.

"I told my dad that I didn't want to know my batting average," said Sharp. "I didn't want it in my head when I went up to the plate. I did see it accidentally once in an e-mail (last season), but I tried forgetting it. I can't remember it now. It was something like .495, but I'm not sure."

Interestingly, Sharp doesn't apply the same rule to some of his other individual statistics. One could talk all day with Sharp about his 61 hits, 61 RBIs, .633 on-base percentage and 56 runs scored — all of which set new school marks after his breakout junior season.

But those statistics don't measure up to the emphasis Sharp places on his batting average. He's the kind of player who'd prefer to smash a line drive to the outfield gap instead of clear the fence. In his mind, home runs are rally-killers. If a blast comes off a natural swing, that's fine. But the selfless Eagle would rather get on base and let one of his teammates drive him home.

"I care more about my batting average," said Sharp, who hits third in the Eagles lineup. "Home runs don't get (teammates) going because they kill the rally. It's my job on the team to get on base and move the runners along."

Sharp has always been a good hitter for average. As a sophomore, his disciplined, compact swing sprayed the ball to both sides of the field, proving he was a well-taught hitter. Early in his high school career, he earned the reputation as a tough out, but he was not yet known as a power hitter.

During the 2010 season, however,

Sharp sprouted from a good hitter into a feared hitter. After growing nearly 3 inches and putting himself through a relentless off-season program, Sharp found tremendous power in his dependable swing. He crushed 15 home runs last spring, one shy of the school mark.

"You can tell he was taught well growing up," said SouthLake baseball coach Rich Landis. "His compact swing covers the entire plate. Last season, he got stronger and just grew into his swing."

"He also has an uncoachable thing, where he's going to battle every time in the box. His average is a credit to his consistency and focus at the plate. That's the only way you can hit over .500 at any level."

Sharps' growth as a hitter has also attracted college attention. This summer — the critical recruiting stretch between his junior and senior seasons — Sharp was 11-for-23 (.478) playing for Huntersville Post 321 in American Legion Baseball.

His performance in Legion ball proved he didn't just build his reputation on inconsistent private-school pitching or the short 325-foot outfield walls at



During the 2010 season, Nathan Sharp set SouthLake Christian records for hits, RBIs, on-base percentage, slugging percentage and runs scored.

SouthLake's baseball field. After watching Sharp perform against Class 4A public-school pitching this summer, college programs such as UNC Asheville, Gardner-Webb, Furman, Wofford and Davidson — to name a few — are betting Sharp can maintain his lofty average against Division I pitching after he graduates next year.

Whichever college baseball program lands Sharp would be wise, however, to wait until after the season to tell him his batting average. □

Q&A

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toward the middle of last season at linebacker for North Meck. There are some others that didn't get much playing time, but Ryan is the name everyone will recognize. He'll play anywhere from (middle) to the (strongside) linebacker positions. He can play from the middle to the outside linebacker.

You'll also see Brandon Mobley, a junior wide receiver from North Meck; Keegan Brennan, a junior quarterback from Lake Norman Charter; Jared Sobo, a junior wide receiver from Hopewell; (and) Connor Millikin, a junior linebacker/tight end from North Meck.

Q: What will be your defensive philosophy?

A: We are going to play both the 3-4 and 4-3 defensive fronts. We want to be an attack defense. We are going to get a lot of people to the football, so we'll blitz a lot.

Q: How will you attack teams offensively?

A: Offensively, we'll be known as a disciplined football team. We'll be able to run and pass the football. Our goal is to not turn the football over and play smart football. We'll run out of the I-formation and run some Spread formation. We'll give multiple formations and some shifts and motions, things of that nature.

We'll try to keep the defenses unbalanced. I've been coaching defenses for a while, and what happens is defensive coaches get to the point where they try to stop every play and every formation. They try to outthink offensive coaches. Great offensive coaches will run the same play out of five or six formations. That makes it tough on your kids to recognize the play coming.

Q: What are the goals this season? What would make it a successful season?

A: The goal this year is to take one game at a time. As a coaching staff, we want to see our kids do the little things right. We

want to see them get better every practice, every play and every game. We want to be able to watch game No. 1 and game No. 10 and see a better team than at the beginning of the season.

Q: What is your coaching philosophy?

A: I would describe myself more as a teacher. The great part of coaching in the educational field is that you are a teacher first. I want to portray that on the football field. I want to teach my kids the game of football. I want to make sure that they know the fundamentals on defense. If it's third-and-short, I want our defense to think run. If it's second-and-short, I want our offensive line to expect the blitz.

I think in high school football now, it's all about coaches wanting to install a lot of things, and they may be rushing through the process. But I want to teach the fundamentals so the kids can recognize (the situations during games). I want our kids to learn the game so they can play full speed on Friday night and have fun doing it.

Q: How will the school's impressive facilities make an impact on your program for years to come?

A: Just like any job, if you have a great work environment, you'll enjoy coming to work. When you play on a pro turf field in a stadium of this nature, with a brand-new weight room, brand-new equipment and jerseys, it's very motivating. It's motivating to be coaching every day and it's motivating for the players.

I think players are products of their environment. You put kids in a good practice and game environment, and they will perform.

Q: Why did you choose the team motto: 'Pull Together'?

A: We want the *players* to pull together. They are not at Hopewell; they are not at North Meck; now they are at Hough High. They are Huskies. I want commitment; I want pride; and we'll play with class.

Our motto is that we'll pull together as a football team and make sure there is no division (in our ranks). We want to play hard, play low, and play fast. □