



Sparks well represented on successful summer squad

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The Muckdogs, a local 19U select baseball team, wrapped up their season Sunday, winning the All World Sports World Series played at Golden Eagle and finished the season with a 47-16-1 record.

The team played its home games at the north Sparks complex but consisted of players from nearby junior colleges such as Mendocino College and Yuba College as well as a number of northern Nevada high school students and 2014 graduates. Eleven players on the team have Rail City roots but assistant coach Bret Pagni said the number of Sparks players is no outlier from year's past.

"We just identify the kids who can compete at our level so certain years we've had more Sparks players, certain years we've had less," Pagni said. "It just comes down to if a kid can play and if he comes from a good family, he's a hard worker, and he's someone we project to be a future college player."

Pagni said he was pleased with the team's summer, which crammed 64 games into a two-month window, but said the overarching goal of the team is to get players exposure to collegiate recruiters and professional scouts.

The program has sent more than 140 players to college programs in its 11 years of existence – 26 to NCAA Div. I programs and eight signed at NCAA Div. II colleges. Three former Muckdogs have been selected in the Major League Baseball draft.

"I think our track record speaks for itself," Pagni said. "There is a of programs out there where you can go win trophies, and go win games and maybe have a good run for a year or two, but I think top to bottom (9U through 19U), if you look at our track record, if you want your kid to play in high school and college, our track record speaks for itself."

The list of local players on the Muckdogs' roster included: Ryan Anderson (to-be junior at Spanish Springs), Casey Carter (2013 Sparks High graduate playing for Yuba College), Pat Burrows (2014 Reed graduate), Matt Mannens (2013 Spanish Springs graduate playing for Colorado Northwestern), Jeff McCusker (2014 Spanish Springs graduate), Kyle Messer (to-be senior at Spanish Springs), Tanner Paris (2012 Reed graduate playing for Mendocino College), Drew Peterson (2014 Spanish Springs graduate), Jon Pinto

(2014 Reed graduate), Kenneth Semenko (2013 Spanish Springs graduate playing for Mendocino College) and Thomas Sertic (2014 Reed graduate).

Sertic, a first-team all league pitcher for the Raiders last spring, was monitored most of the summer after logging heaving innings for Reed. Pagni said Sertic's ability to throw multiple pitches for strikes and his work ethic make him a potential Div. I or Div. II college player.

McCusker was a first-team infielder for the Cougars last spring and hit in the cleanup spot for the Muckdogs.

"(He had) a terrific summer. He was one of our best hitters," Pagni said. "He runs well, has a great body, (is) very versatile, can play the outfield, third base, first base, another terrific kid. (He) hits with power and doesn't strike out a lot. He's a five-tool kid.

"He has the potential to play collegiately at Div. I and possibly professional baseball if he's able to refine his skills."

Anderson is a 6-5 lefty and was the youngest player on the Muckdogs' roster. His arsenal and size have already put him on the collegiate and professional level maps.

"(He) is an incredible talent," Pagni said. "(He) got a lot of hitters out for such a young age ... (He) repeats his delivery really well, great mental makeup and just a good kid. That kid is going to go pretty dang far."

The Muckdogs have successfully recruited local talent and have become a power in the 19U travel ball scene, winning 40 or more games the last eight seasons.

"I feel really good especially because of the caliber of the competition we play," Pagni said. "It was really high, we played in seven different tournaments ...

"To finish with that record, against that level of competition, far exceeds where we thought we'd be at the start of the summer."