

# NHSBCA/Baseball America National High School Baseball Champions



## Archbishop McCarthy High School Fort Lauderdale, Florida

By Casie Vogel

At the end of the season, Archbishop McCarthy High's Varsity team finds themselves ranked no. 1 in the country by Baseball America/NHSBCA after winning their second, back-to-back, state championship.

The Archbishop Mavericks were previously ranked no. 3, but after the results of other state tournaments, the Mavericks' 29-3 record and 10-game winning streak pushed them to the top of the charts.

"It's a honor that people would think that we have that kind of program and that kind of work ethic to be one of the top teams in the country. There's so much good baseball out there," said Head Coach Richard Bielski.

On May 24<sup>th</sup>, Archbishop faced Tampa Jesuit High School (Tampa, Fla.), winning 4-1, in the Florida Class 4A final at Digital Domain Park in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

"We were able to get our second consecutive state championship this year, a very exciting game over another top-ranked team," Bielski said. "It has been quite a celebration. The boys are very excited. They played some great baseball there, got some great pitching and some clutch hitting."

The exciting final game was led by some of the team's star players including Alex Fernandez Jr., INF/P, who hit the game-winning home run off of a 95 mph pitch from Lance McCullers, a top-ranked junior on the Jesuit team. Fernandez, a senior, was the team's co-MVP, 10-0 on the mound, had 49 RBIs, was no. 1 hitter in the lineup, hitting close to 500, and has committed to University of Miami, according to Bielski.

Jose Brizuela, 3B/P, closed out both the semi-final game and the final championship game on the mound, throwing about 92 mph. Brizeula, a senior and a team leader, is the team's lead-off hitter and hits just under 500. Junior Nick Travieso, 1B/P who throws

about 94-95 mph, came in as middle relief during the game. Travieso is going to the Under Armor All-American game in Chicago and has already committed to University of Miami.

Other star players include Garrett Kennedy, C, who is going to University of Miami, as well as the team's returning players Nick Bosco, SS, who is also going to the Under Armor game, and Andre Martinez, P/1B, who has been the team's ace for the past two years and has scholarship offers from multiple schools.

Even with great players, getting to the final game wasn't all easy, according to Bielski. Archbishop's director of baseball, Alex Fernandez, former Marlins and White Sox pitcher, created the "toughest, most brutal" schedule for the team to prepare them for defending the championship. With that pressure of defending the title, the Mavericks struggled to focus on the game at hand.

"We felt we were a very talented team from the beginning, we felt we had an excellent run at being state champions, which is extremely rare in Florida, and just stay focused on the here and now," Bielski said. "Even us coaches, we knew we had a very talented team, we knew we were nationally recognized, and there were high expectations of our team."

Last year's seniors took with them some of the team's hitting power, but the team prevailed with what Bielski calls clutch, timely hitting.

"When the game was on the line, when the running comes in, when the pressure was on, they responded. That's not always the case with every team, with every player. That's a special gift, that's a special talent," he said. "I'm just so proud that the boys were able to do that and they were able to do that time and time again over the season."

The Mavericks have seven graduating seniors, five of which were in the lineup. With the four returning seniors, the team looks strong for next year and even more will be expected from the team.

"It just took really that effort out of everyone to elevate your game every little bit and to play unselfishly that I think really got us to the championship game last year and I think got us to the championship this year," Bielski said.

Check out <http://maverickbaseball.net/> for information and photos of the Archbishop McCarthy High School baseball team, as well as a video on the home page of the team celebrating at the end of the final game.