

Around The Nation: April 26

Notre Dame Prep, Bishop Gorman riding high

By **Nathan Rode** (*Baseball America*)

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By sifting through the Baseball America Draft Database, you wouldn't know it, but Scottsdale, Ariz.'s Notre Dame Prep is only on its fifth group of graduating seniors. The first three alone produced five draft picks and one of those, Pete Bourjos, is a fixture on the Angels' Top 10 Prospects lists.

Despite the past draft success, it would be hard for the Saints to rival this season's overall accomplishments. They are 23-1 this season, ranked No. 6 in the latest Baseball America/National High School Baseball Coaches Association poll.

The Saints only loss of the season came to No. 5 Mater Dei (Santa Ana, Calif.) in the Anderson Bat National Classic. Not only was it their only loss of the season, but it was lefthander Jordan Luvisi's first varsity loss ever.

Head coach Gaetano Gianni chalks up their current status to the big years he is getting from key players. Luvisi is 7-1, 2.23 with 56 strikeouts in 38 innings.

"On the mound (Luvisi) is pretty tough," Gaetano said. "He has a good fastball that he likes to throw inside and his curveball has been really good. He can spot it when he wants."

Luvisi is also leading the team in home runs with nine. Righthander Casey Upperman, who is committed to Arizona, is the leading arm with a 5-0, 1.56 record accompanied by 45 strikeouts in 36 innings.

"Casey is doing really well," Gaetano added. "He has had a lot of success the past couple of years. He's definitely a big star. He's starting to swing that bat for us two."

Against perennial Arizona power Chaparral High (Scottsdale) Upperman had a grand slam and a single that helped bring his line up to .367/.535/.767 in 30 at-bats.

As a team the Saints are hitting .363/.470/.607 and have more walks (123) than strikeouts (114).

Upperman figures to be the top draft pick from the 2009 club. He stands a 6-foot-1, 175 and can touch 94 mph with his fastball. The fastball is firm with his quick arm and he has a good breaking ball.

Gael Force Wins

Preseason No. 1 Bishop Gorman High (Las Vegas) didn't exactly start the season off on the right foot. The Gaels lost their season opener and then went 2-2 at the Big League Dugout tournament in Scottsdale, Ariz. After losing the

third game of the Scottsdale tournament to Brophy College Prep of Phoenix, Bishop Gorman salvaged the fourth and final game of the event and began the streak they're currently riding.

"We've been playing great," head coach Chris Sheff said. "We got off to a slow start. We lost our opener. We went to Scottsdale, gave up two hits in our first game and lost."

After winning Monday night, the win streak has reached 27 games. During that streak the Gaels have scored 397 runs while giving up just 52. Everybody on the team has contributed. Third baseman R.J. Santigate had reached base in 19 consecutive plate appearances at one point, a streak that also included 15 straight hits. But one player that seems locked in the most is first baseman Jeff Malm. He's hitting .582/.672/1.044 in 91 at-bats with 10 home runs and 51 RBIs.

"We got off to a rough start and everything," Malm said, "but I think that might have been a blessing in disguise. We expected to just come out and win and that didn't really happen. We came together after that. Every at-bat I'm trying to do something to help the team, get on base."

Malm has failed to reach base in only two games this season and his hitless in just five. With him and Santigate leading the charge, Bishop Gorman is looking to continue steamrolling toward the playoffs.

"Last year we shared the league title," Sheff said. "Now we have a chance to win it outright for the first time in my six years here."

Whatever streak the Gaels may be on, their trip toward a fourth straight state championship won't be easy. They have four league games left and five teams in their league have been ranked in the state's top 10 this season. The groove they're in is just what they need.