

Around The Nation: June 9

By Nathan Rode

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It wasn't easy by any stretch, but Honolulu's Punahou High recently claimed its sixth straight Hawaii state title. It's the school's 12th title since 1959.

"It's pretty amazing," head coach Eric Kadooka said. "We were a real young team. We had three returning starters and the league was real tough. Our expectations were we just wanted to try and compete."

Punahou finished the regular season 8-6, good for fourth place in the league, before getting hot in the playoffs. The playoffs in Hawaii follow a double-elimination format, which gives teams a second season as Kadooka puts it. Punahou won its first two games of the tournament before losing in the semifinals. That put Punahou in a playoff against Honolulu's Mid-Pacific Institute. The Buff n' Blue then marched on without losing another game to lift the trophy.

Punahou is a strong candidate to land in the Baseball America/National High School Baseball Coaches Association Top 50 when the rankings expand next week. Competition in Hawaii is limited, but don't be fooled. These teams can hold their own. Punahou frequently makes trips to the mainland to challenge strong programs in Texas and on the West Coast. Las Vegas' Bishop Gorman High typically sends its American Legion team there as well to get some games in.

"Hawaii kids are a little smaller," Kadooka added. "Our guys don't pass the look test. But they have a toughness. They don't play the long ball. They put it in play, run hard and get in front of everything. The quality of pitching is a little less but it's a different style. We throw more breaking balls."

Hawaiian players don't get quite the exposure as those on the mainland, but when players like Kurt Suzuki and Shane Victorino break through people start to notice. Kadooka also mentioned that after Punahou was ranked in years past, he would call coaches about tournaments and they would know about his program already. It may never be on par with the likes of California, Florida and Texas, but Hawaii has more than just beautiful beaches and good surfing.