

Parkview Dynasty Goes National



Panthers named Team of the Year

By Nathan Rode (*Baseball America*)

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Before each season begins, Chan Brown hosts a dinner at his house for the seniors on the Parkview High (Lilburn, Ga.) baseball team. It's a time for the head coach to meet with his eldest players and discuss goals and expectations before the first pitch is thrown.

With a strong group of players back after winning a 5-A state title in 2011, the 2012 seniors had their sights set high. Matt Olson, a slugging first baseman and the staff ace, stood up and said it straight.

"Anything less than a region and state title would be a disappointment," he recalled. "The whole national thing would be a cherry on top. It's crazy that all three worked out."

Parkview spent the entire season in the Baseball America/High School Baseball Coaches Association Top 25, fluctuating up and down as the season went on, but finished with a second consecutive 5-A state championship—beating rival Brookwood High (Snellville, Ga.) in the finals—and is Baseball America's 2012 High School Team of the Year.

Parkview opened the season as the top-ranked team in Georgia and Brown knew teams would be targeting them. But he also believed his team was good enough to be there in the end and focused on keeping his players positive during a difficult early-season schedule.

"Early on, with our out-of-region schedule, we try to challenge our kids," Brown said. "We put everybody through a test to see how we would do down the road. We've taken some losses because of that, but it makes us better. We felt good and were playing good ball going into the National High School Invitational."

Several teams traveled to Cary, N.C., for the NHSI at the end of March, knowing that going 4-0 would give them a good shot at finishing atop the Top 25. Parkview dropped two games before the event to good teams in Cartersville (Ga.) High and Columbus (Ga.) High, but blew past New York's Washington High in the opening round. That set up a tilt between the Panthers and Harvard-Westlake High of Studio City, Calif.

Fortunately for Parkview, the Wolverines were without right-hander Lucas Giolito, the top right handed pitching prospect in the country. But unfortunately, they had to face Max

Fried—the top left handed prospect in the country and eventually seventh overall pick in the draft. Parkview battled early and Olson even homered off of Fried, but lefty Mac Marshall had to exit the game with an injury and Harvard-Westlake jumped all over the bullpen and won 10-3.

"We really didn't know what to expect in Cary, but the kids' excitement was very high," Brown added. "When we lost to Harvard-Westlake, that was a huge disappointment, but a huge motivator too. The kids turned it on after that."

Parkview won 10 of their next 12 games, losing only to Brookwood, who twice started right-hander Lucas Sims—the Braves' first-round pick. A win over South Gwinnett High (Snellville, Ga.) gave the Panthers their third straight region championship and they followed it with a win over Columbus, avenging an earlier loss, and had a 21-5 record as the playoffs began. They swept the first two rounds, but got a tough draw in the third having to travel to Hillgrove High (Powder Springs), the team they beat for the state title in 2011. And for a second straight year, Parkview dropped the opening game of the best-of-three series.

"Both series mirrored each other," Brown said. "We were in a lull, but turned back into the team we have been and took the momentum from them."

It was smooth sailing from there as Parkview swept Mill Creek High (Hochston) and Brookwood in the next two series to capture a second straight state championship.

Continuing Legacy

Parkview has developed into one of the strongest programs in a talent-rich state after winning five state in the last 16 years. The Panthers also won titles in 1996, 2001 and 2002, and the tradition of the program has carried through to the latest group of players.

"I like to think we left a legacy around this community," Olson said. "The Parkview tradition is one that I don't think can be matched. There's a lot of pride associated with Parkview that you take strongly in."

Ten years ago, Parkview was celebrating back-to-back titles and had four players go on to play professionally, including Jeff Francouer. Hugh "Buck" Buchanan, now a member of the BCA Hall of Fame and a scout for the Braves, was the head coach then and saw some parallels between his teams and the past two Parkview squads.

"There were some similarities, if nothing else both played very difficult schedules," he said. "That was something we believed in and had to do. Coach Brown has continued to do that. We played anybody, anywhere, anytime. You feel like that's going to prepare the youngsters down the road. That proved to help us then and it helped them this year."

Buchanan added that they had to bounce back from Game One losses and were ranked highly too. The latest Parkview team also had its own high-profile prospect in Olson. Also a first team all-American, Olson is committed to Vanderbilt and was the 47th overall pick in the draft by the Athletics. He was drafted as a first baseman thanks to his potent bat and hit .385 with nine home runs and 47 RBIs in 96 at-bats this season.

He was also a key leader for the Panthers. After that senior dinner, he and fellow right-

handler Jesse Foster stood at their cars for an hour talking about the season and how it was going to be based on them setting the tempo with their pitching.

"Olson, when he needed to, he spoke," Brown said. "And our bulldog was Jesse Foster. Our second game against Hillgrove, he was lights out. That whole senior class, they've been special since they came in."

The Panthers' mantra all season was "Teamwork makes the dream work" and they persevered through challenges to bring home another state championship and new accomplishment to put in a trophy case.

"They're together over 300 days a year," Brown said. "They love each other like I've never seen. The chemistry this group brings, there's no quit in them."