

Standout Pitching Performances

by **Clint Longenecker** (*Baseball America*)

With winter officially ending (though still here in spirit), high school baseball has started in much of the country. Here's a look at some of the highlights from the early part of the season.

- The top prep righthander in the class, 6-foot-6, 245-pound Tyler Kolek of Shepherd (Texas) High, has gotten off to a blistering start and has reportedly touched 100 mph this spring after touching 99 mph at both the Perfect Game All-American Classic and Under Armour All-American Game. Kolek has started three games and has thrown 16 innings. He hit yet to allow a hit and has allowed only one walk. With 35 strikeouts on the season, Kolek has struck out more than two-thirds of the 52 hitters he has faced.

- Although the defending state champion and No. 4 ranked team in the country, **Owasso (Okla.) High**, has a run differential of plus-28 through five games, the Rams lost to Bishop Kelley High (Tulsa, Okla.), 8-4 on March 10. That loss ended the Rams' 38-game winning streak, which was the fourth-longest in the nation. The last time the Rams lost was in the 2012 state playoffs.

Pitching has been the strength of the team in the early going, as the Rams allowed only one run combined in the other four games.

Senior righthander Braden Webb has thrown no-hitters in his first two starts. He has struck out 23 against six walks in 12 innings. Webb has also hit a home run in his second start. The South Carolina commit was an Area Code Games participant, where his fastball was 88-91 mph with sink and touched 92. The quick-armed Webb has touched 93 this spring from a high three-quarters arm slot. His curveball shows the makings of an average pitch, and Webb complements the offering with a changeup. The 6-foot-2, 199-pound Webb, who is old for the class and will be 19 on draft day, has a strong, athletic build with long arms.

Lefthander Jeb Bargfeldt, a Wichita State commit, threw a two-hit shutout in his first start and allowed only one hit in his second, striking out 12.

- **The Clovis (Calif.) High** Cougars are off to a strong start before the team heads to USA Baseball's National High School Invitational at the end of the month. Clovis returns eight starters and is an offensive ballclub that has outscored its opponents by 76 runs in 13 games. Clovis has a headlining prospect in shortstop Jacob Gatewood, who has arguably as much raw power as any high school player in the class and reportedly hit a 486-foot home run in a victory over Rocklin (Calif.) High.

The Fresno area is an amateur talent hotbed with potential first-rounders in Gatewood and Sanger (Calif.) High righthander Luis Ortiz and another potential first-day selection in Buchanan High (Clovis, Calif.) outfielder Trenton Kemp. The Tri-Rivers Athletic Conference also has a number of teams that could factor into the national rankings. Buchanan, off to a 10-0 start, jumped to No. 16 in last week's national rankings before Clovis handed it its first loss. Clovis also handed Clovis West High its first loss of the season. Clovis West is coached by Kevin Patrick, the son of longtime Clovis head coach James Patrick.

The Cougars entered the season looking to replace significant key innings from last year's team and the pitching has been strong. Clovis has allowed one or two runs in seven of its 13 games and its record stands at 12-1.

- **Archbishop McCarthy High** (Southwest Ranches, Fla.) is off to a 13-1 start in its quest for a fifth-straight state championship. With three seniors committed to DI schools in the rotation and an experienced defense, run prevention was expected to be the Mavericks strength and it has proven so in the early stages of the season. In 14 games, the staff has thrown eight shutouts and has allowed one run four times. Archbishop McCarthy's lone defeat came in an 8-3 loss to Coral Gables High (Miami, Fla.). The Mavericks have outscored their opponents by 110 runs. Archbishop McCarthy defeated a ranked opponent in No. 21 American Heritage (Plantation, Fla.) 5-0 in the first week of March and the two will square off again on Friday.

- The top team in the Tar Heel state, No. 15 **T.C. Roberson** (Asheville, N.C.), is off to a 5-0 start with a plus-23 run differential. This sets up a prime matchup on Saturday against the Rams' biggest threat in the state, North Buncombe (Weaverville, N.C.), which is also off to a 5-0 start. North Buncombe has mashed in the early going, scoring at least 10 runs in its five games, outscoring its opponents by 54 runs and hitting a combined .474/.539/.753 with 25 extra-base hits.

The matchup with North Buncombe pits the top pitcher in the state, North Buncombe lefthander Alex Destino (South Carolina), against the best hitter, Roberson first baseman Braxton Davidson (North Carolina), in a tough same-side matchup for the lefthanded-hitting Davidson. This is the Rams' final game before the start of the National High School Invitational next week.