

Prep Roundup: April 15

By **Clint Longenecker** (*Baseball America*)

The “Battle for Broward County” on Saturday was also the first time two top 10 teams faced off as No. 1 Archbishop McCarthy High (Southwest Ranches, Fla.) played No. 7 Flanagan High (Pembroke Pines, Fla.). Both teams entered the game with one loss coming down the home stretch of their schedules.

Archbishop McCarthy, in pursuit of its fifth consecutive state championship, threw its most experienced starter and top prospect, senior lefthander Brian Gonzalez, while Flanagan countered with junior righthander Genry Fortuno. The respective staff aces made it a low-scoring affair, as Gonzalez struck out nine over 6 1/3 innings and Fortuno struck out eight in a complete game effort. Gonzalez, a Miami commit, is a strong-bodied, strike-thrower with an above-average changeup and a fastball touched 91 mph in the fall and sat in the mid to high-80s on the showcase circuit. Fortuno is also a fastball-changeup hurler with a high-80s fastball, mixing in a big-breaking, loopy curveball.

Both teams scored one run in the fourth inning and entered the seventh inning tied 1-1. Flanagan, the home team, had runners on second and third with one out in the seventh against lefthander Aaron Soto, who relieved Gonzalez after the first two hitters in the inning. Soto was 83-86 at the Florida Diamond Club last fall. Senior center field Oscar Rodriguez hit a ground ball to third base to score junior catcher Miguel Presno for a 2-1 victory for the Falcons. Presno was able to avoid the tag from McCarthy third baseman Alex Rodriguez to score the winning run.

The loss ended an 18-game winning streak for Archbishop McCarthy, which did not play a clean game defensively and made two errors.

• **No. 21 Langham Creek High** (Houston), which moved into the rankings for the first time last week, has continued to play well in many facets of the game with a 22-1 record and plus 129 run differential. Langham has averaged 8.3 runs per-game and has scored more than 10 runs in nearly 40 percent of its games and has also shut out opponents in nearly 40 percent of its games. The team has a .297/.407/.428 line with more walks than strikeouts. The Lobos turn games into track meets by stealing 104 bases on the season, an average of 4.5 per game. The running game has not only been dynamic in its sheer volume but also its efficiency, as the Lobos have only been thrown out twice for a success rate of 98.1 percent. Conversely, Langham has shut down opponents’ running games, throwing out 50 percent of runners and surrendering only 13 steals on the year, an average of .56 per game.

Senior center fielder Eric Thomas is an offensive catalyst who is drawing interest from a draft perspective. Thomas is a switching-hitting, gliding runner with at least plus speed (likely plus-plus) who has stolen 30 bases without being caught. The 19-year-old Thomas, who is old for the class, has a lean, athletic and wiry build at 5-foot-11, 170 pounds and is committed to Sam Houston State.

The Lobos’ top senior arm is lefthander Aaron Fletcher, a Houston commit. He sat in the mid-80s at Jupiter and touched 89 mph with an arm slot below three-quarters. The 6-foot-1, 220-pound Fletcher has a husky, durable build and has struck out 37 percent of all hitters on the season with a 4.4 strikeout-walk ratio.

• **Sarasota (Fla.) High** has positioned itself well for the stretch run of the regular season, entering the week with a 20-2 record. The Sailors went 5-1 in the Perfect Game Showdown earlier this month and have five seniors committed to Division I schools. Sarasota has been one of the top run-prevention teams in the country, allowing only 1.4 runs per game with a plus-123

run differential. Games against Venice (Fla.) High and Tampa (Fla.) Jesuit this week, and another game to end the week, end the Sailors tough regular season schedule.

Infielder Dylan Busby is the top position player on the team and a single-digit round talent. The athletic, versatile Busby played all over the field on the showcase circuit and has feel for the game with strong baseball aptitude. The 6-foot-2 Busby, who weighed 165 pounds on the showcase circuit, has gained more than 10 pounds of muscle since the summer and has a wiry build with long limbs that looks the part in a uniform.

Busby, an above-average runner in the 60-yard dash, is a long strider who mostly posted home-to-first times of 4.35-4.45 on the showcase circuit because of a slower start out of the box, but his speed plays underway and going extra bases. He swings righthanded in games settings but has shown the athleticism to switch hit. Busby is a contact-oriented hitter with bat speed and a line drive-oriented swing. He puts together competitive at-bats and his power is to the gaps.

The Central Florida commit has first-step quickness, moves well laterally and is an instinctual, sure-handed defender capable of handling multiple infield spots with an average arm.

The headlining senior arm on the Sailors' staff is righthander Evan Mendoza, a North Carolina State commit. Mendoza is a strike-thrower who gets downhill plane and some sink from a high three-quarters arm slot. His fastball has touched 91 and sat in the high 80s at Florida Diamond Club. Mendoza, who is young for the class, has shown the makings of an above-average changeup. Young for the class, Mendoza has an athletic build at 6-foot-2, 185 pounds with a strong lower half. Six-foot-5, 195-pound senior righthander Joe Cavallaro has a projectable build and large frame. The South Florida commit's fastball was 85-88 at FDC.

• **No. 19 Loyola High** (Los Angeles) lost its opening game of the season but the Cubs have not lost since, posting a 14-1-1 record with a plus-82 run differential. The Cubs have ridden the strength of their pitching behind four arms who are committed to Pac-12 schools; lefthander Quinn Brodey (Stanford) and a trio of righthanders, Kyle Beadles (Arizona), Jack Poulson (Southern California) and Nathan Hadley (UCLA). The quartet has combined to throw 83 percent of the team's innings this year, collectively striking out more than a hitter an inning with a 1.67 ERA. The Cubs will face one of the top opponents on their schedule Thursday when they take on Harvard-Westlake, which was ranked in the top 10 before falling out of the last ranking.