

Team  **Watching**



***Seton Hall Preparatory High School
West Orange, NJ***

Some schools have very distinguished and notable programs that continue to produce talent year after year. Besides having talent, some school's have an opportunity to compete in the highest level of state competition. Seton Hall Prep is no exception, having won their third straight championship in New Jersey.

The Pirates are coached by Mike Sheppard Jr., who had two goals when he was growing up. One was to play baseball in the Major Leagues, the other, to one day return to coach his alma mater's team.

Sheppard was drafted by the Houston Astros, after graduating from Seton Hall Prep in 1977. When things didn't totally work out, he returned to Seton Hall Prep to "Do things right."

It seems that he has worked hard and achieved his goals, collecting three state championships in a row.

"It's a nice feeling. This kind of thing doesn't happen to often. You're lucky to win one," quotes Sheppard.

Of course to achieve such a feat requires not only good coaching, but talent. Coach Sheppard was confident that this year's team had good pitching with Rick Porcello and Evan Danieli. His concern was offense, which struggled in the beginning of the season. This was possibly due to the attention Porcello was receiving, being a top prospect for many major league and college teams.

"I was surprised by the kids, they did a great job. The seniors were all responsible for the attitude of the team. They really led by example," comments Coach.

When asked about the highlight of the 2007 season, Coach Sheppard remembers two games within a 48 hour period. It starts with the one blemish on the Pirates record for the year having dropped a battle to a very good Roxbury High School team 7-1. Until this point Seton Hall Prep was the number one ranked team in the nation.

“We didn’t expect to go undefeated. The loss kinda took the pressure off. It was exciting after the fact because the team really seemed to gel from that point. It became a one game at a time situation, and it rejuvenated the idea of keeping everything even,” reports Coach Sheppard.

The idea and plan to remain even was well regarded by the team. Porcello took the approach to heart and pitched a perfect game against Newark Academy. He threw 77 pitches, 63 strikes and only 14 balls. He didn’t allow a hit or a run and struck out 12. The Pirates won 2-0.

As the season rolled on, the buzz surrounding Porcello continued to grow. However, the Pirates did a good job focusing on the task at hand and forgetting all about the attention of the scouts and media. They played hard and won the third consecutive Non-Public A state championship, beating St. Josephs of Metuchen 10-1.

Porcello was named was named the 2006-07 Gatorade national baseball player of the year. He was also selected in the first-round of the 2007 MLB draft by the Detroit Tigers. He was 10-0 with a 1.18 ERA, as well striking out 112 with just 15 walks in 71 innings. He also batted .478 with 48 hits, 11 home runs and 48 RBIs.

Three in a row is a challenge hard to master. Congratulations Pirates! Good luck next year!

By David Himmelstein