

MELHS welcomes new baseball coach Matt Pomerantz, team primed for success

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – New Metro East Lutheran baseball coach Matt Pomerantz is excited about the impending start of the baseball season.

The Knights have shown much improvement since preseason practice got under way recently, showing “a lot of improvement”. Pomerantz said. “These guys are putting in the time and effort and working hard; I’m excited to get started.”

MEL opens the season at Belleville West Tuesday. “We're pumped and ready to go,” Pomerantz said. Last year's Knights reached the Class 1A New Athens Regional final before being eliminated 2-1 by Valmeyer.

“There's definitely some room for improvement; our infield needs a little more tweaking and fundamentals on some of the plays we have going on, but I think it will improve over the next couple of days and as the season goes on. We're going to get ready for (IHSA Class 1A) regionals and go from there.”

Several Knights are standing out so far this preseason, Pomerantz feels. “I have a plethora of players who are standing out and leaders on this team,” Pomerantz said. “Our seniors are doing an excellent job on trying to help develop the underclassmen.

“Jake Jump, Eric O'Connor, Noah Coddington, John Hubbard and Eli Jacobs (this year's MEL seniors); they're all out there and putting out all the effort they can – they're listening to what I have to say and it's going to show on the field, I have no doubt about that.”

Pomerantz has coached his son's team and has been a player-coach previously. “I enjoy developing younger players, helping them try to get to the next level,” Pomerantz said. “I'm a very competitive person and I think I can bring a lot to this school – it's exciting to be part of this new program and this new culture we're instilling today.”

The Knights' goals are simple for 2017 – win the IHSA Class 1A state championship. “That's the goal for this year,” Pomerantz said. “Of course, we're going to take it game by game and try to win regionals and sectionals first – state's the ultimate goal.

“That's why we're working as hard as we are; this is a team that could do it.”

Joel Rempfer, the previous coach, will stay on as an assistant on Pomerantz's staff this season; he'll be joined by Rob Stock and newcomer Pat Brannan, who has played at Triad and at Lewis and Clark Community College.

Pitching should be a strong point for this year's Knights, Pomerantz thinks, led by Jump. “Pitching and defense wins games; we've already improved on our hitting, but our pitching and defense are going to be phenomenal, I have no doubt,” Pomerantz said. “Jake will be the ace of our staff, but we'll be working on a four- or five-man rotation; that's a little bit up in the air right now. I do have four solid starters and I'm working on a couple that are showing a lot of progress; I'm excited to get them on the hill as well.”

Some new pitch-count rules implemented for this season by the IHSA will play a part of game strategy this season. “They're going to play a part in the strategy I have,”

Pomerantz said. “I'm working on a couple of different ideas right now; it's going to depend on our schedule and who we're facing.

“It's going to be a game-changer for a lot of coaches, but I have a pretty good idea of the individuals I'm working with and what I want to do, but I'm excited to get started.”

