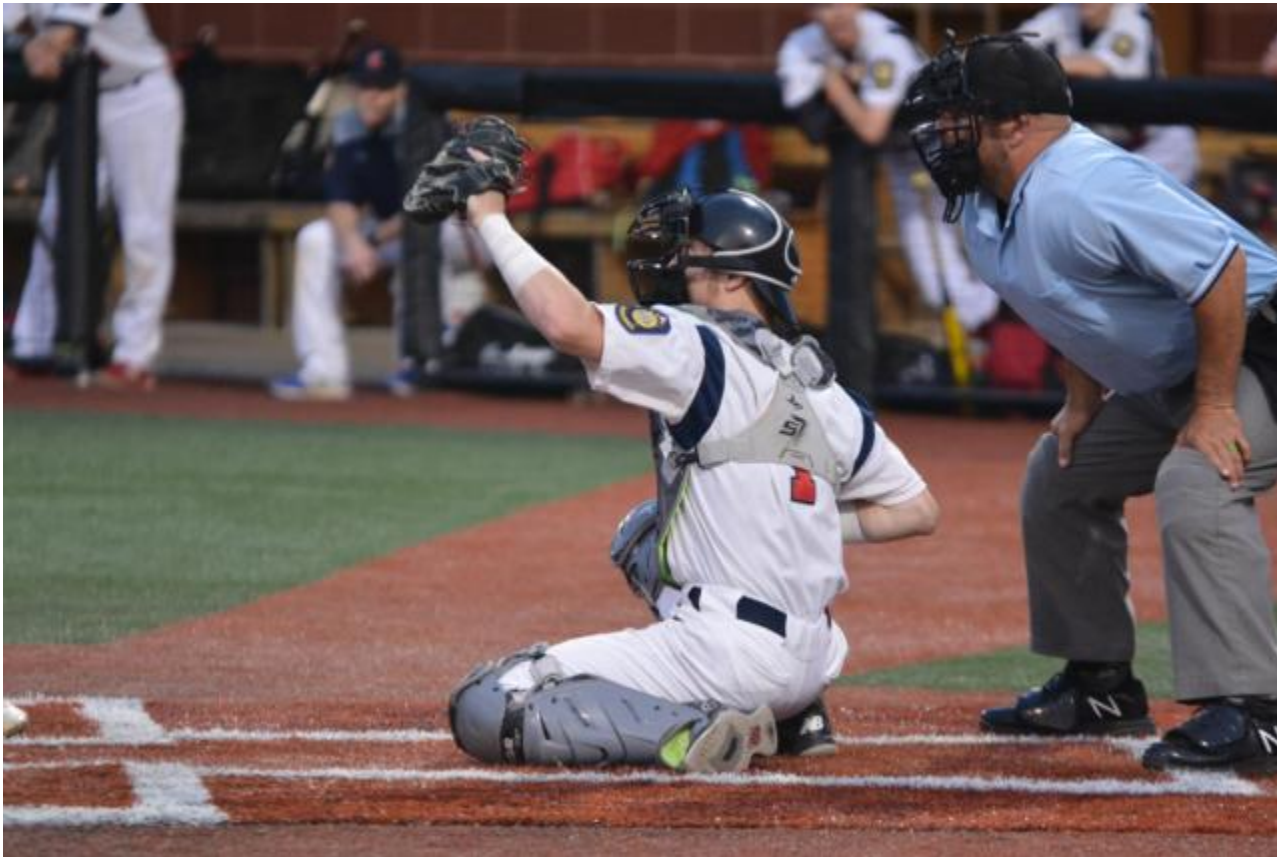


Alton Post 126 Rained Out Against Highland, Pitching And Defense Will be Keys To 2019 Success

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – As the Alton Post 126 American Legion baseball team is getting its summer season underway, there's one thing about the team that stands out already – it's a very experienced squad that looks to do well this season.

“We should be good,” said Post 126 manager Doug Booten in an interview after their scheduled District 22 opener was postponed because of rain and lightning around Roy E. Lee Field at SIU-Edwardsville on Tuesday evening. That game may be played at 8 p. m. next Tuesday at SIUE, although not yet officially decided. “We have a lot of experienced players, and I have a lot of confidence in them. We don’t have any superstars on this team, just a bunch of grinders.”

And those grinders are a group of very hard-working players who came very close to advancing to last year’s American Legion Great Lakes Regional tournament in suburban Toledo, Ohio, the last step before the American Legion World Series. In fact, that one word – experience – is the key one.

“I think you can take what we accomplished last year,” Booten said, “when we were one pitch away from going to the Great Lakes regional in Ohio.”

And as far as this season goes, Booten isn’t looking that far ahead as of now.

“I don’t think we need to look that far ahead,” Booten said. “We need to take it one game at a time.”

The current roster is a very experienced one, indeed. The majority of the players come from Alton High School, such as Adam Stilts, Zach Knight, Nathan Lemons, and Preston Schepers, along with former Alton player Cullen McBride. Gage Booten comes from East Alton-Wood River High School, while Ethan Kopsie comes from Marquette Catholic. Other players on the initial roster include Jayce Maag, Griffin Bianco, and Ryan Best.

“You could look at our roster, and say all nine players on the field are returnees from last year,” Booten said.

The keys to success are, as with most ball clubs, pitching and defense.

“I think with just about any baseball team, how your pitching goes determines how far you’ll go,” Booten said. “But we also have to play good defense, too, and I believe we can. I just think we need to take advantage of the other team’s mistakes, and we need to move our runners into scoring position. We get our runners in scoring position, and we have a few timely hits, we should be fine.”

The schedule is very competitive as well. In addition to District 22 games, with Belleville, East St. Louis, Highland and New Athens, the Legionnaires will be playing good out-of-district competition in Gillespie, Lincoln, Ill., Manchester, Mo., and Jerseyville. There will also be tournaments, such as this weekend’s tournament in

Ballwin, Mo., and another next weekend in Festus, Mo., both of which consists of many of the best teams in St. Louis Legion baseball. The group stage Alton will play in the Ballwin tournament consists of Chesterfield, Mo., Thoman-Boothe of St. Louis, and the host Ballwin team, while the group play in the Festus tournament will be Danville, Ste. Genevieve, Mo., and Jackson, Mo.

“We’re involved in a tournament in Missouri this weekend,” Booten said, “which is a very competitive tournament.”

The highlight of the tournament schedule will be the annual Firecracker tournament over Fourth of July weekend. Alton’s group is with Ballwin, Jackson, Freeburg, and McLeansboro. Other teams involved with be Jerseyville, Belleville, Jefferson City, Mo., Festus, Harrisburg, and Manchester.

“It’s always fun, and it’s always competitive,” Booten said of the Firecracker tournament.

Overall, Booten is looking forward to the season and enjoys very much working with his team.

“It’s summer, and I can say that Legion baseball is very enjoyable,” Booten said, “and I love working with the kids as well.”