

Alton Post 126 American Legion Club Begins COVID-19 League Play Saturday

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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ALTON - Although the Illinois American Legion baseball season was cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Alton Post 126 club is set to begin its 2020 season on Saturday.

The Legionnaires will be playing in the COVID-19 league, formed by the Washington, Mo., Legion team, and will include many teams in the St. Louis area. Play begins on Saturday in Washington, with the senior team taking playing a doubleheader in Washington, going up against the hosts at 11 a.m., followed by a game against Hannibal, Mo., at 1 p.m. The Junior Legionnaires will then play the same two teams in their opener at the same times on Sunday.

Both the junior and senior teams will play on the road for the entire month of June, and then will have home games in July at Lloyd Hopkins Field at Gordon Moore Park in Alton. The games will mainly be doubleheaders, starting at 6 p.m., with junior-senior doubleheaders to be played in July.

Many of the players are working out on their own in preparation for the abbreviated season, but Alton manager Doug Booten is very excited to be getting back on the field with his players.

"We're doing the best that we can," Booten said. "Most of the pitchers are throwing on their own. The pitching will be really strong. We have lots of depth on the mound, and pitching and defense will be our strengths. And we've got enough older players on the team that if our pitching is sub-par, we can overcome it with our hitting. We should be a good all-around team."

Booten also cautioned that it will take a while for things to start clicking, due to the extended layoff of many of the players, but once things start coming together, everything will be fine.

"It might be a little rough for a week or two," Booten said. "because these kids haven't played in a year. But I think we'll be fine. Everyone's in the same boat."

Many of the players that are expected to contribute to the Legionnaires' success in the 2020 season are Lewis and Clark Community College's Adam Stilts, Trenton Segarra and Ryne Hanslow, John Durrwachter, Owen Macias, Preston Schepers and Tyler Steward from Alton, East Alton-Wood River's Gage Booten and Kenny Beachum, Cullen McBride from Illinois College, Bryce Higginbotham and Blane Lancaster of Gillespie, Ted Webb from Roxana and Caden Shearlock from Staunton.

The Junior Legionnaires are a young team, and will have 10 players from Alton --- Seth Johnson, Caden Laslie, Ashton Schepers, James Stendebach, Nick Rayfield, Miles Windmiller, Jackson Kenney, Graham McAfoos, Connor McCarthy and Garrett Billingsley. Four other players --- Nick Kelsay, Lucas Moore, Tyler Robinson and Julian Marshall - hail from East Alton-Wood River, while Jon Webb is from Roxana, and Luke Parmentier is from Civic Memorial.

"Our junior team is young,' Booten said, "and it'll be a learning season for them."

But the most important thing for both teams is that they'll be able to play in games, and the main goal for Booten is to get as many games as possible in for his teams.

"Everyone's very excited," Booten said, "and my goal is to just get the kids as many games as I can."

And the schedule isn't your typical American Legion baseball schedule, with not only the state season being cancelled, but the Legion regional tournaments and Legion World Series in Shelby, N.C., being cancelled as well.

"Our schedule doesn't look like anything in the past," Booten said. "It's not the typical Legion schedule."

It's still a good schedule, with games set against teams such as St. Peters, Kirkwood, Maryland Heights and Manchester in St. Louis and St. Charles Counties, along with tournaments in Washington and Elsberry, Mo., before home games against Highland, Belleville, Troy and Piasa Southwestern in July. There will also be an Illinois vs. Missouri Battle tournament set for Washington in mid-July.

But the biggest thing for the Legionnaires is that they will be able to have a season and compete in games, and Booten and his players are very much looking forward to the opportunity.

"They're really excited," Booten said. "They're just needing some games."