

# Pitching top topic at Oakes' family reunion

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It's a good thing Mackenzie Oakes likes to pitch. Otherwise her family might disown her.

## PHOTOS:



Photo by Amy Rymer/The Californian

Stockdale senior Mackenzie Oakes was selected at The Californian's Softball Player of the Year.

"She tried out for a team and didn't make it, and she was real disappointed," Nieblas said. "I said, 'Hey, you like the game? Let's go to the next level.'

"She started busting her tail -- she worked so hard -- and she's come a long way. And she'll be the first one to tell you she's got a lot of room for improvement."

Said Oakes: "I want to develop more pitches and be more consistent. I may not have my best pitches going (that day), but I still want to be dominant.

"If my velocity is down, I want to rely on movement. If it's not movement, I want to rely on mechanics to I can hit the corners, even if I'm not having a good day."

Oakes credits Brant Brown for her improved hitting. Brown, the Bakersfield Blaze hitting coach, gives batting lessons.

But pitching has been Oakes' forte. And she readily admits it's been an advantage being in a family of pitchers.

The Oakes family and pitching go together like bread and butter.

Her mom, Shannon (Oakes) Nieblas, is the Stockdale High softball coach and a former standout pitcher at South High, Cal State Northridge and Cal State Bakersfield.

Her grandfather, Wayland Oakes, has worked with countless youngsters for years as a softball pitching coach.

And Stockdale High is reaping the benefits of those bloodlines and all that knowledge.

A junior, Oakes helped the Mustangs to a 21-11-1 season, a Southwest Yosemite League co-championship and a berth in the Central Section Division I playoffs, where Stockdale reached the semifinals.

Oakes' brilliant pitching season, combined with her best season as a hitter, has earned her *The Californian's* All-Area Softball Player of the Year award.

"It's such a great honor. I'm so excited about that," said Oakes. "It's a great honor to follow so many great players."

Oakes had a 9-4 record this season with an ERA of 0.53. She struck out 103, walked only 12 and allowed 42 hits in 79.1 innings.

Offensively, she batted .439 with five home runs, 31 RBIs and 36 hits in 82 at-bats. Oakes also had 21 walks.

She is playing with some of the best young players in Southern California on the prestigious Orange County Bat Busters and SoCal Athletics club teams.

And she's already given Division I power Fresno State a verbal commitment, even though she has one high school year remaining.

"She's had to work for everything she's gotten," Nieblas said of her daughter.

The turning point was when Oakes was 11 or 12, Nieblas said.

"My grandpa taught me how to pitch," she said. "He worked with me and my mom worked with me. They both know so much about the game it's great.

"It really helps. Others go to pitching coaches. I can do it at home, and I can do it at any time of the day."

Playing on a team where her mother is the coach was daunting at first, Oakes said.

"I tried too hard and put a lot of pressure on myself," Oakes said. "Some people say I was playing only because I was the coach's daughter. People are going to think that, no matter what.

"This year I matured more. I realized I can only think about things I can control. I can't control what others are thinking."

Nieblas said she thinks her daughter will continue to improve because of the experience she's getting with the high-powered club teams.

"I've seen her take off, her overall game," Nieblas said. "She's seeing that tough competition all the time, and she's just gotten smarter in the game.

"She's privileged to play on two of the best teams in the nation for club."