



Two from Westlake picked

By Rhiannon Potkey
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The scouts perched in the stands at Westlake High baseball games this season were a good indication.

But confirmation of the talent on the field came Thursday when Westlake had two players selected during the first day of Major League Baseball's amateur draft.

Cutter Dykstra followed in his father's professional footsteps by being selected in the second round by the Milwaukee Brewers while his Westlake teammate, Graham Johnson, was taken in the sixth round by the Florida Marlins.

"It's uncommon, but at the same time this whole Conejo Valley is just laden with good athletes," Westlake coach Zach Miller said of having two players from the same school picked. "This year it just happens to be Westlake, but all the schools have talented kids. The Marmonte League is tough for a good reason."

Oxnard High graduate Edwin Quirarte rounded out the area's first-day selections as the San Francisco Giants took the Cal State Northridge junior pitcher in the fifth round with the 147th pick overall. It marked a 34-round improvement from high school, when Quirarte was drafted in the 39th round by the Atlanta Braves in 2005.

"I was a Dodgers fan growing up, but the opportunity to play the sport I love is a dream come true," Quirarte said. "I am just really excited and ready to go play professional baseball right now."

Dykstra, the son of former New York Met and Philadelphia Philly outfielder Lenny, was the 54th selection overall. The 18-year-old shortstop/outfielder batted .473 with 44 hits, 40 runs scored and 18 RBIs for Westlake in 29 games this season.

He demonstrated power at the plate with 14 extra-base hits, including five homers and eight doubles, and a fearless nature on defense by smashing into an outfield fence and breaking his nose during a game last month.

"If it was me picking, I'd take him with the first pick in the first round," Miller said. "There will be a lot of people who think he's being selected just because of his father, but they would be mistaken. This kid works at baseball, seven days a week, and he's going to become a fine major leaguer. He hits, he fields, he has the ability to do it all."

Johnson surfaced on the scouts' radar this season once he started throwing harder. He took the call from the Marlins while listening to the draft on the radio at his house.

"They like tall pitchers, so it wasn't that much of a surprise they picked me," said Johnson, the 178th pick overall. "All the scouts I met and talked with were really nice people and good people and it seemed like they were really happy that they picked me."

Johnson has committed to Fresno State, but is planning to weigh his options after talking with the Marlins.

"We are not 100 percent sure yet what is going to go on," Johnson said. "Hopefully, I go play pro."

At 5-foot-11, 180-pounds, scouts project Dykstra as a second baseman or center fielder.

Dykstra has committed to UCLA, but that was before becoming such a high draft choice.

Lenny wasn't selected until the 13th round of the 1981 draft, then flourished during a 12-year career with the Mets and Phillies from 1985 through 1996.

The outfielder was a three-time All-Star, played in two World Series and twice led the National League in hits.

Today, Lenny is a successful businessman who provides stock tips and the founder of "Players Club" — a magazine designed for pro athletes to help them "keep living the dream."

After his son's selection Thursday, it's likely he added a new subscriber with a familiar address and last name.

"I just wish I had a chance to coach him for a couple more years," Miller said of Cutter.



Hart pitcher becomes part of Royals' plans

By Gerry Gittelson, Staff Writer
Inside SOCAL

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Michael Montgomery, chosen as a sandwich pick between the first and second rounds by the Kansas City Royals (36th overall), finally had a chance to calm down Thursday afternoon, a few hours after fulfilling his lifelong dream of being drafted by a Major League team.

"We had some friends over, and I was getting a little nervous and kind of sweating it out through the first round," said Montgomery, a left-handed pitcher from Hart High of Newhall.

"Then when my name was called, everyone was going crazy, and I couldn't even hear the TV. I think they said something about basketball, but I couldn't even hear it. I'm finally calming down from all the excitement."

Montgomery is 6-foot-4 and throws 93 mph with pinpoint control. He finished 8-2 with a 1.41 ERA and 99 strikeouts and just 25 walks in 69 innings this past season, as his stock rose considerably with an average of about a dozen pro scouts attending his every start.

Montgomery has signed to play college baseball at Cal State Fullerton, but he almost certainly will forego the scholarship to join the Royals organization immediately. Montgomery's agent, Paul Cohen, of Encino, said signability won't be an issue.

"I was on the phone with the Royals' scouting director yesterday, and they pretty much told me they were going to draft him if Michael fell to (No. 36)," Cohen said. "At this point it's highly unlikely he won't sign. We're excited for Michael."

"Kansas City is a good place for him because they're really committed to developing high school players now that general manager Dayton Moore is there. He was the same way all those years for the Atlanta Braves."

In the second round, outfielder Cutter Dykstra of Westlake was picked by the Milwaukee Brewers, No. 54 overall.

"It's awesome. Just great. This is a dream come true," Dykstra said. "That's a good spot for me."

Dykstra, the son of former major leaguer Lenny Dykstra, plans to turn pro instead of playing at UCLA.

Dykstra batted .473 with five home runs and 40 runs in 29 games for Westlake this past season. He played shortstop and center field, where he projects in the majors, though there is talk of him fitting in at second base, too.

In the third round, Edgar Olmos, a left-handed pitcher from Birmingham, was drafted by the Florida Marlins, 83rd overall. That was a mild surprise, as Olmos did not receive much publicity this year playing for a sub-.500 team, and he was not projected as a top prospect on some web sites.

The area's only other prep player picked within the first six rounds was 6-foot-6 Graham Johnson of Westlake, a hard-throwing right-hander.

Others with local ties who were drafted included UCLA's Tim Murphy and Brandon Crawford, Pepperdine's Chase d'Arnaud, Cal's Josh Satin (Harvard-Westlake), Cal State Northridge's Edwin Quirarte and College of the Canyons' Tyreece House.

Murphy, a left-handed pitcher/outfielder was picked by Texas in the fourth round. Crawford, an

infielder, was selected one round later by San Francisco, which also picked Quirarte, a right-handed pitcher, in the fifth round. D'Arnaud, a shortstop, was picked in the fourth round by Pittsburgh.

In the sixth round, House, an outfielder who attended Palmdale High, was picked by Oakland. Satin, an infielder, was selected by the New York Mets.

Tampa Bay began the 50-round draft at Disney World in Orlando, Fla., which continues today, by selecting high school shortstop Tim Beckham out of Griffin, Ga.

With the second pick, Pittsburgh chose Vanderbilt third baseman Pedro Alvarez. Florida high school first baseman Eric Hosmer went third to Kansas City, and Baltimore took top college pitching prospect Brian Matusz out of San Diego with the fourth pick.

The Associated Press contributed.

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Bandy's catching skills may get noticed today

By Loren Ledin
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In Jett Bandy's mind-set, baseball has never been a "me" sport. The Thousand Oaks High senior catcher has tailored his skills to winning games.

"That's definitely a big part of being a catcher," Bandy said. "You can have an off day at the plate, but it doesn't matter, you've got to forget about it and do your job behind the plate.

"No matter what you do with the bat, you can help your team win by working hard and handling the game at catcher. The important thing for me is helping the team win."

The selfless Bandy just might take his turn in the spotlight today.

The 6-foot-4, 215 pound senior, blessed with a strong arm and a quick bat, rates as the prototype catching prospect. He could be chosen inside the top five or six rounds when Major League Baseball conducts its annual amateur draft beginning at 11 a.m. PDT.

Bandy is one of several Ventura County high school seniors who figure to be selected in the two-day event.

Cutter Dykstra, Westlake High's sterling outfielder and the son of former Mets outfielder Lenny Dykstra, is considered among the nation's top high school prospects and a possible first-round pick.

St. Bonaventure infielder Casey Serna, Thousand Oaks pitchers Chad Smith and Jeff Johnson, Royal pitcher Matt Magill and Tanner Peters and Westlake infielder Shane Kroker and pitcher Graham Johnson top the list of area hopefuls.

County graduates could have an eventful couple of days, too.

Oxnard High graduate Edwin Quirarte, now a junior pitcher at Cal State Northridge, is among area graduates who could be taken by professional organizations.

Ventura College slugger and Ventura High product Jose Vargas will be following the draft from his home on Ventura Avenue.

"I've had a couple of scouts tell me I'd go in the top 10 rounds, but they can't promise me anything," said Vargas. "I don't really have any expectations right now."

Vargas' teammate, pitcher Zach Thornton of Oak Park, shares his relaxed attitude.

"I'll just be hanging out with friends, trying to take it easy and not think about it," said Thornton, who

has signed with the University of Oregon.

Former Oxnard College slugger Erik Komatsu, who could be selected inside the top five rounds today, will also have his mind on other things today. Komatsu will be preparing with his teammates at Cal State Fullerton for this weekend's NCAA Super Regional. The Titans host Stanford Friday.

"I'm going to be at practice," said Komatsu.

Other local college products whose names could be called include the Moorpark College battery of catcher Steve Domecus and pitcher Chris Notti, as well as former Royal High and Oxnard College catcher Tyler Diamond, who earned NAIA first-team All-America honors by leading The Master's College in seven offensive categories.

The baseball draft itself is making the transition from low-key status to spectacle.

The two-day event is staged at The Milk House, a 70,000-square-foot facility at Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex in Orlando, Fla. Day 1 is televised by ESPN2 and carried on MLB.com.

For the region's top prospects, the draft could bring both high achievements and hard choices.

Bandy has committed to playing college baseball at the University of Arizona. The right circumstances could send him instead to the minor leagues.

"It's really exciting," said Bandy, who batted .373 with 26 RBIs and a county-high nine home runs this spring. "Anybody who plays baseball dreams about being drafted by a major league team. But I also have signed to play at the best college baseball program in America.

"For me, it's a total win-win situation."

Serna, also the quarterback on St. Bonaventure's CIF-Southern Section championship team last fall, has signed his letter of intent to play baseball at the University of Oregon.

He said the possibility of being selected in the MLB draft seems mostly dreamlike.

"It's kind of surreal to me," Serna said. "You dream about it as a kid, but I almost can't believe it could happen for me in the next couple of days."

Serna, who batted .500 with 44 hits and a region-best 16 doubles, also is thrilled to have his scholarship for Oregon.

"I can't wait to get there and play," he said. "It would take a lot for me to give that up."

Smith, Thousand Oaks' star pitcher who finished 7-1 with an earned run average of 2.01, is trying to downplay his excitement. In fact, he will be attending his college orientation at USC on draft day.

"It's a big event," Smith says of the draft. "But I've tried to not get too excited as I think about it. If you don't get drafted, or you don't get drafted very high, it could be a letdown. What happens will happen.

"I've got my scholarship to USC. For me whatever happens is a win-win situation."

In the months leading up to the draft, Bandy has been contacted by a host of major league teams. Enough so that it doesn't matter who might select him.

"I'd be excited to play for anybody," he said.

Bandy's meteoric rise as a catcher is a tribute to his athletic ability.

A year ago, with senior Chris Hannick (now at Cal State Northridge) entrenched at catcher, Bandy played a variety of positions.

He shifted fulltime to catcher last summer, and made a seamless transition.

"I like it a lot," he said. "You're at the heart of the game on every play."

By midseason, coach Frank Mutz allowed Bandy to call the pitches. He also terrorized opposing baserunners by throwing out 18 of 20 who attempted to steal a base.

"He's a great catcher who's going to do well in college or as a professional," said Smith.

Among the collegians who be chosen, Quirate has been waiting three years for this chance.

After his senior season at Oxnard High in 2005, Quirarte was taken by the Cincinnati Reds in the 39th round. Instead of signing, Quirarte chose to play at Cal State Northridge.

"I've got no regrets," said Quirarte, who posted eight saves this past season. "I had time to get used to the speed of the game at the college level. I've become a lot better pitcher."

