

### **10u Carolina Elite Rays (4 - 0, 1st place)**

The 10u Rays won all 4 of their games this past weekend to win 1st place in the Kinston Super NIT tournament. This was the spring 2010 season finale for the Rays, so it was definitely a nice way to finish the season!

There's not much to write about the weekend for the Rays. They got some good pitching, and played some decent defense. This was especially important given the extreme heat of the weekend (the best way to deal with heat is to have quick innings defensively, so you can get off the field- then have good innings offensively, and make your opponent stand out there and bake in it).

Offensively, they used the tried and true formula of being patient at the plate to get runners on base, and then being aggressive at the plate to drive those guys in. There were a few missed opportunities that need to be corrected (especially when it's the SAME players making the SAME mistakes). Our players have to understand that you are not allowed to do that. Mistakes are a part of the game, and a part of life. Coaches understand that mistakes are a part of the game (remember us coaches were once players too, and we made our fair share of them). However, us coaches do expect an effort from each individual player to learn from those mistakes, and to make it important to correct them, so they aren't happening over and over again. The specifics I am talking about are the players that are constantly missing green lights on base. It's the same players. The players that are constantly forgetting there are 2 outs on base - they are the same players. And the players that are constantly taking called 3rd strikes in the box - they are the same players. Everyone messes up sometimes, but I need to see the individuals on this team who have been talked to about these things repeatedly to make it important enough to them to stop doing them. That's improvement. That's what it takes to become a better ballplayer - a desire to improve in the areas that coaches are emphasizing with you. This will be especially important over the summer months, when I expect more players to join the Carolina Elite program in this age group, which means players are going to have to work harder if they want to stay on the field. That is not something to be feared, but something to be embraced. Remember - if you are willing to compete against your teammates for your own job, that means you are also willing to take that competitiveness on the field against an opponent to beat them, AND THAT IS WHAT COACHES WANT IN A PLAYER!!!

### **12u Carolina Elite Wildcats (4 -1, 1st place)**

The 12u Wildcats won all 3 of their Sunday games to win the championship in the Kinston Super NIT this past weekend. The 3 wins included a 9 - 7 win over the Wayne County Pirates in the morning, an 8 - 4 win over the Wilson Pelicans in the afternoon semifinal, and an 8 - 3 win over the Raleigh Rage in the championship.

This was the spring 2010 season finale for the Wildcats, and a good way to finish out there season before preparing to head to Cooperstown, NY for their national tournament August 7. What was most impressive to me about the weekend were the different ways the Wildcats were able to win their final 2 games to claim the title (it's impressive because it is what good teams have to be able to do, but many teams are either unable, or are not willing to do it).

The Wildcats took a very aggressive approach into the batter's box against the Pelicans in the semifinal. Their pitchers are dominant (meaning they throw hard, and have strike out stuff). They are also usually around the plate, so they don't walk a whole lot of guys. Moreover, they are quick to the plate (with a good throwing catcher), so we knew our ability to steal would be very limited. Hmmmm - they aren't going to walk us, and we can't steal bases (so those walks that we're not going to get aren't going to be as valuable anyway.....so how do we score runs)??? The answer is we have to do it with the bat. That may sound obvious to some people, but it's still not that simple. Again the Wildcat pitchers are dominant, which means scoring runs with the bat isn't simply going out there and getting a bunch of hits (you don't get a bunch of hits off of dominant pitchers - they wouldn't be "dominant" if they consistently gave up a lot of hits)! Therefore, you have to be really aggressive early in the count (remember they aren't going to walk you, so there is no point in taking pitches), and try to do DAMAGE with your hits - meaning doubles and homeruns. The beauty of extra base hits is they are immediate run scores - you don't need to string them together. Doubles can score a guy from 1st base,

and homeruns obviously score anyone on base as well as the hitter. In that game we hit 4 homeruns, and had a number of balls driven to the fence - it was a great job of executing a mental approach we took into that game!!!

Conversely, we switched our approach in the championship game against the Raleigh Rage. We had just come off a great hitting game, and now we were up against pitchers that weren't nearly as dominant as the pitchers we faced on the Pelicans. Also, they were not as good at holding runners, so the opportunity to possibly steal some bases was back in play. As a team, we took a more patient approach into the batter's box for a few reasons:

1. When you're not facing a dominant pitcher, then you don't have to "fear" hitting behind in the count, or with 2 strikes. When they don't have that strike out stuff, if you did happen to fall behind in the count you still have the ability to put the ball in play regardless of what pitch they throw you, because it's not a dominant swing and miss pitch.
2. Walks are now more usable/valuable, because we can steal bases again against this team. Therefore, going deep into the count and possibly drawing more walks will have a bigger impact on our offense, because of our ability to be more aggressive on the bases.
3. We just came off a good hitting game against great pitching, and the natural tendency for hitters is to "think" they are now better than they are, and to step into the box and try to duplicate what they did in the previous game. The problem with that is you are now facing a pitcher that isn't as dominant, and this is a bad combination (It's like facing Jamie Moyer one game after you have faced Roy Halladay). Jamie Moyer will use the aggressiveness you had against Halladay against you - he wants you to swing early. When you go from dominant to not dominant you have to be more patient, so you don't allow that pitcher to use your aggressiveness against you by throwing a bunch of pitcher's pitches at you early in the count and getting you to chase them (and get yourself out). In addition, the more pitches you see against him, the better chance you have of eventually squaring one up (and remember we can afford to see a lot of his pitches, because he doesn't have that dominant swing and miss stuff).

Understand that dominant versus not-dominant doesn't mean good versus bad. There are a lot of pitchers with dominant stuff that aren't as good as pitchers with not-dominant stuff. Dominant simply refers to how hard their pitches are to "make contact" with. Moyer is very EASY to hit, he just can be very hard to square up - which makes him very good without being dominant. On the other hand AJ Burnett with the Yankees has dominant stuff, but at times he flat out stinks because he can get his breaking ball over the plate, and can't locate his fastball in the strike zone. "Dominant" and "good" are not the same thing in baseball.

Final note to bring it all together - these were two completely different offensive approaches against two completely different teams. The result was we won both games, scoring the same amount of runs versus both teams. We used 4 home runs to score 8 runs against the Pelicans, and we didn't hit one home run (but we were still able to score 8 runs) against the Rage. Good teams, and good players have the ability to change their MENTAL offensive approach (I'm not talking about an actual physical change in the box - we don't change our swing here guys) depending on who we're facing, and what we are trying to do in that particular at-bat. I thought we did a great job of that this past weekend, and we won a title because of it!!!

### **14u Carolina Elite Eagles (4 - 0, 1st place)**

The 14u Eagles finished off the Carolina Elite sweep by going 4 - 0, and taking home the championship in their age group this past weekend. This was the first time that Carolina Elite swept championships in a tournament where 3 or more teams were playing.

The most impressive thing about this past weekend was how dominant the Eagles were while missing so many players. This is very gratifying to me, because it is what I set out to do when I started this program in 2006. My goal was develop good baseball players, NOT good baseball teams. Good "teams" are made up of good players, and therefore I knew if I develop players, then the teams would take care of themselves. Saturday we were without 5 Eagles (out of a total of 12 players currently on the roster). On Sunday, we had a couple guys there that weren't there Saturday, but we also lost 3 players that were there (so we essentially traded no-

shows). Despite all the no-shows, and players being there for one game, and then not being there for the next, the team stayed strong the entire weekend. This was because the program has progressed to the point where there is a lot of depth at these older age groups (which is necessary, because the no-show thing is very common with all the obligations the older guys have with other teams, church, etc)... In the past I have had to replace guys, but I've never had the depth to be able to do it with other players where there wasn't a significant drop-off in ability, and knowledge. We have lost a lot of games in previous seasons due to a fill in player not being able to get the job done at a level near the missing starter. It resulted in a bad physical play that lost us a game, or mental mistakes that lost us the game due to the fact that they just hadn't developed the knowledge of the game yet. This weekend was another example of a weekend where I had a ton of holes to fill (just like in previous seasons). However, the guys that I asked to fill in were developed players, with a good knowledge of the game. The result was there wasn't much of a drop-off from starter to fill-in. The team was strong 1 through 9 regardless of who was there, and who wasn't. This was extremely exciting to witness. It's basically like Carolina Elite has it's own farm system - what the minor leagues do for major league teams. When a player goes down with an injury - you simply call up a triple A guy who may not be as good as the guy that went down, but he's still a very good player, and therefore your team doesn't miss a beat. Lastly, the guys who were fill ins have learned BASEBALL, not a "specific position". Therefore, they can fill in at different spots in the field and do a good job. I can put my 13u 1st baseman in left field for a 14u game and know that he knows his responsibilities out there, because he has learned the game of baseball as a whole, as opposed to just what he needs to do at 1st base. What we saw this past weekend from the Eagles is what can, and will happen when you combine players that have learned the complete game of baseball. You can mix and match, put them anywhere on the field, and anywhere in the lineup, and they will look like a team that has played together for years at those spots, even though this was the first time this group had every set foot on a field together - that's awesome to see, and I'm very proud of this collection of players that have developed to the point where they can do this.