

Hanover's Jake Mayers named T-D player of the year



CHARLES LEFFLER/MEDIA GENERAL NEWS SERVICE

Hanover ace Jake Mayers went 10-0 with a 0.76 ERA.

By [TIM PEARRELL](#)

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Ask Jake Mayers to describe his career at Hanover High School, and he'll tell you that it was a learning experience with his baseball and social skills. There's a message about relationships in his answer.

For all of his accomplishments -- Times-Dispatch player of the year, Central Region player of the year, first-team all-state -- the pitcher/third baseman is just as happy to talk about the bar the Hawks established for the program.

Hanover, in its sixth season, went 24-2, won the Central Region title and finished as the state Group AAA runner-up. The 2005 team won the region title before losing in the first round of the state tournament.

"We wanted to reset the standard, and we did it by far," Mayers said. "We had good chemistry. Everybody was pointing in the same direction. No individualism. It was an awesome season."

Despite missing two weeks and losing 15 pounds after having his tonsils removed, the 6-1, 190-pound right-hander went 10-0 with a 0.76 ERA. He threw back-to-back shutouts -- getting one

inning of relief help in the second game -- in the quarterfinals and semifinals of the state tournament.

"It was his job to refuse to lose," Hanover coach Charlie Dragum said. "When he touched the ball, he was going to get it done for Hanover."

There was a time early in his career when Mayers said he was more about getting it done for his travel team and himself.

Much was expected of Mayers after an AAU career that Dragum described as almost legendary.

"Everybody was telling him how great he was, and he was great," Dragum said. "In an AAU tournament, he hit like nine home runs in 11 at-bats."

Baseball America ranked Mayers among the top 14-year-olds in the country. All that, he said, went to his head.

"I was cocky," he said. "It was just a phase, being inexperienced in trying to be more of a team guy. When I played on my travel team, yeah it's a team thing, but you're also trying to make yourself better and get your name out there."

Mayers grew up in Glen Allen. He moved to Mechanicsville in the sixth grade, so he didn't have much chemistry with the older players at Hanover even though he went 5-1 with a 1.55 ERA as a freshman.

Mayers said Dragum sat down with him after that season and told him, among other things, that "there's more things in life than just yourself."

Two seniors, Joey Saunders and Jimmy Stewart, took Mayers under their wings during Mayers' sophomore year. Saunders, in particular, had a big influence on Mayers when it came to carrying himself around his teammates and others.

His baseball skills needed little guidance. In his four seasons at Hanover, Mayers went 27-6 with a 1.17 ERA and seven saves. Blessed with an upper-80s fastball, great command and an unceasing work ethic, he registered 319 strikeouts and had just 55 walks in 221²/₃ innings.

"Having joined them helped me see high school is more of a team thing than anything I've been part of," he said. "You have to get that chemistry . . . to be good because everybody's got to be pointing in that direction."

"It was a huge learning experience. It basically got me where I needed to be."

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The rest of the Times-Dispatch 2009 All-Metro baseball team

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Blake Hauser

School: Manchester

Year: Senior

Position: Pitcher

The skinny: Repeat selection, but at a different position. Was selected as an outfielder last year. Fireballing right-hander was the Dominion District player of the year and second-team all-state after going 7-2 with a 2.16 ERA. Had 73 strikeouts in 482/3 innings. Drafted in 25th round by Cleveland; signed with VCU.

What you didn't know: "I love going hunting and fishing and being outside."

Chris Ayers

School: Manchester

Year: Junior

Position: Catcher

The skinny: Was a second-team all-state selection after hitting .446 with 4 HR and 17 RBI for the Dominion District champion Lancers. Struck out just four times and committed just one error. Three-year starter has 15 career home runs.

What you didn't know: "I like country and rap."

Austin Erb

School: Hanover

Year: Senior

Position: First base

The skinny: Left-handed cleanup hitter was a big part of the Hawks' potent offense. Batted .458 with 8 HR and 33 RBI. Walked 26 times. Second-team all-state pick had a .932 slugging percentage and a .974 fielding percentage.

What you didn't know: "I'm definitely afraid of heights."

Laine Denton

School: Hanover

Year: Senior

Position: Second base

The skinny: Moves up from the second team. Hit .458 and had 8 HR and 27 RBI batting in the heart of the order. Had homers in three consecutive games in the region and state playoffs. Almost half of his hits went for extra bases.

What you didn't know: "I play Call of Duty on Xbox, probably a little bit too much."

Reed Gragnani

School: Mills Godwin

Year: Senior

Position: Shortstop

The skinny: Repeat selection. Colonial District player of the year batted .422 with 6 HR and 25 RBI. Second-team all-state pick walked 21 times, scored 30 runs and stole 16 bases. Drafted by Boston in the 27th round; signed with Virginia.

What you didn't know: "I have a lucky pillow that I always take with me."

Joey Cujas

School: Manchester

Year: Junior

Position: Third base

The skinny: Few people can match these offensive numbers: .515, 6 HR, 38 RBI. Three-year starter hit higher than .500 for the second consecutive year; has a .491 career average. Struck out just five times. Was named first-team all-state.

What you didn't know: "I spend a lot of time surfing on the Internet."

Bill Cullen

School: Thomas Dale

Year: Junior

Position: Outfield

The skinny: Central District player of the year and second-team all-state pick hit .483 with 4 HR and 28 RBI. Stole 14 bases. Hit for the cycle and had seven RBI in one game. Went 7-2 with a 2.11 ERA on the mound. Had 74 strikeouts in 53 innings.

What you didn't know: "I'm very sensitive."

Austin Kilbourne

School: Matoaca

Year: Junior

Position: Outfield

The skinny: Moves up after being a second-team selection as an outfielder last year. One of two members on the team to hit .500. First-team all-region pick had 1 HR and 28 RBI. Scored 23 runs and stole 10 bases.

What you didn't know: "I like fishing and I love listening to music."

Adam Blankinship

School: Mills Godwin

Year: Junior

Position: Outfield

The skinny: Was a key component for a team that went 18-5 and was the Colonial District regular-season champ. First-team all-region pick hit .437 with 4 HR and 19 RBI. Had 9 doubles and 2 triples and scored 26 runs.

What you didn't know: "Most people know everything about me."

J.T. Wauford

School: Steward

Year: Senior

Position: Utility

The skinny: Moved up from last year's second team (pitcher). Went 9-1 with a 1.00 ERA this season (28 hits, 79 strikeouts in 49 innings). Hit .418 with 3 HR and 34 RBI and had 15 doubles. Signed with Clemson.

What you didn't know: "I write left-handed and do everything left-handed, but I play baseball right-handed."

Campbell Henkel

School: St. Christopher's

Year: Junior

Position: Utility

The skinny: Played first and pitched. Hit .406 with 9 HR and 34 RBI. Had 20 extra-base hits and a 1.016 slugging percentage. Went 5-3 with a 4.50 ERA and two saves (62 strikeouts in 462/3 innings) on the mound.

What you didn't know: "I spend a lot of my time listening to music."

R.C. Orlan

School: Deep Run

Year: Senior

Position: Utility

The skinny: Hit .421 with 3 HR and 22 RBI. Went 6-4 with a 2.85 ERA on the mound for the region runners-up Wildcats. First-team all-state as a utility player. Drafted by the Dodgers in the 44th round; signed with North Carolina.

What you didn't know: "I do everything left-handed, but I bat right-handed."