

Swinging (and Coaching) for Success: Baseball Area Champs on the Rise

By Maddy Grant

With swinging bats and cheering crowds, Altamont baseball is rising and starting to make a name for itself. After years of extensive repair and remodeling, the program appears to be on the right track for success in the seasons ahead. Everything seems fresh with new players, great coaches, and even larger crowds. Don't believe me? Visit Comer Field and see for yourself.



Altamont faced challenging baseball seasons several years ago, but over the past two to three years, it has successfully revitalized the program. The coach, Jeff Schalk, joined Altamont three years ago, a decision that proved to be pivotal.

Schalk began playing baseball at just two and a half years old for his brother's T-ball team. His eagerness to play often led him to dress out, just in case he had the chance to get into the game. He attended the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he played baseball from 2012 to 2015. After graduation, he quickly entered the coaching scene. Schalk ended up figuring out “pretty quickly that [coaching] was something I loved doing, and the money aspect wasn't the focus anymore. Being able to help athletes reach their full potential and learn life lessons through baseball is what drives me to keep doing this.”

He says his core values include growth and community: “Athletic development, personal development, and guys just out there having fun ... means way more” than winning every single game. Schalk intends to make memories with his team and enjoy every single moment of the game, win or lose.

Since 2022, Altamont Baseball increased practices to five days a week, give or take with game days. Schalk believes there should be no off days for success and in creating accountable men out of the players. Players are *required* to stay focused on the field and engage 100 percent in all the activities. An average practice lasts two hours, with stretching, drills, and mechanics work. Each day features a different schedule to enhance the skills of every player. Depending on the day, players can participate in position-specific drills. This allows players to improve their positional and all-around game. After all, he points out, it's only you and yourself out there when you're at bat.

All this came together in April in arguably the best moment of a season when the team had 16 wins and 7 losses (with 6 wins and zero losses in the area): winning the 3A Area 8 Championship! The players put in all the work and came out with the win. When each player does their job and performs how they practice, then the team does exactly what they want to

do: win. Players are what make a team a team, and without Mose Stephens and Aubrey Sanders, who would lead? Without Miles Sanders, who would do the hard jobs? Without Tylan Floyd and Jonas Haren, who would motivate and hype everyone else? These are just a few of the players who make up this winning team. With help from Coach Schalk and his players, the Knights create a welcoming culture for *all*, new or experienced, allowing them to feel as though they have been part of team for much longer. But I predict it won't be much longer before the next championship.