

FLW Outdoors

National Guard FLW College Fishing Northern Division Headed to Lake Champlain



by Julie Huber,

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(Jun. 16, 2011 - PLATTSBURGH, N.Y.)...

National Guard FLW College Fishing is headed to Lake Champlain June 25 for the second of four stops in the Northern Division. Forty college teams will be competing for a top award of \$10,000 to be split between the school and bass fishing club; \$7,500 for bass club and \$2,500 for their school.

"Teams should be looking for small and largemouth bass on beds," said IAMS/Pringles pro Vic Vatalaro of Kent, Ohio. "The bass are going to be spawning. The smallmouth will be easy to find in the clear water of Champlain and they won't be any deeper than 5 to 12 feet. The smallmouth typically like the small or subtle points in shallow water and I would be throwing tubes to catch them."

Anglers will take off from Plattsburgh Boat Basin located at 5 Dock Street in Plattsburgh, N.Y., at 6:30 a.m. Saturday. Weigh-in will be held at the marina beginning at 1 p.m. Takeoff and weigh-in are free and open to the public.

Schools competing in the Lake Champlain tournament, which is hosted by the City of Plattsburgh, include:

Carnegie Mellon University - Radford University
Castleton State University - Ramapo College
Central Connecticut State University - Rensselaer
Central Michigan - Rochester Institute of Technology
Chestnut Hill College - Shepherd University
Christopher Newport - Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania
Cornell University - Slippery Rock University
East Carolina University - State University of New York, Plattsburgh
Fairmont State University - University of Connecticut
Gardner-Webb University - University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Glenville State College - University of North Carolina, Charlotte
Hampden-Sydney College - University of North Carolina, Wilmington
Kent State University - University of Virginia
La Roche College - Vermont Technical College
Longwood University - Virginia Tech
Michigan State University - Wake Forest University
North Carolina State University - Wayne State University
Northwood University - West Point
Ohio University - West Virginia University
Penn State - Xavier University

The top five teams from each tournament will qualify for the regional championship where the first-place team wins \$12,500 cash for their school and \$12,500 cash and a Ranger 177TR bass boat with a 90 horsepower Evinrude or Mercury outboard wrapped in school colors for their fishing club. The top five teams from each regional tournament advance to the national championship where the first-place team wins \$25,000 for their school and \$50,000 cash and a Ranger 177TR bass boat with a 90 horsepower Evinrude or Mercury outboard wrapped in school colors for their fishing club.

College Fishing is free to enter and FLW Outdoors provides boats and drivers for each competing team along with travel allowances. All participants must be registered, full-time undergraduate students at a four-year college or university and members of a fishing club recognized by their college or university.

For regular updates, photos, tournament news and more, follow College Fishing on Facebook at Facebook.com/FLWCollegeFishing and on Twitter at Twitter.com/CollegeFishing. Visit CollegeFishing.com to sign up or to start a club at your school.

ABOUT FLW OUTDOORS

FLW Outdoors is the best in fishing, on and off the water. Anglers worldwide can compete for millions over the course of 191 tournaments in 2011. FLW Outdoors has taken fishing mainstream with the world's richest fantasy sports game, FLW Fantasy Fishing presented by Straight Talk, where competitors can play for free as well as sign up for Player's Advantage to gain an edge. For more information about FLW Outdoors and FLW Fantasy Fishing, visit the FLW website.

Shepherd cancels coaches caravan

Shepherd University has cancelled a planned coaches caravan that had been slated for Saturday, June 25 in Springfield, Virginia.

Shepherd athletic director B.J. Pumroy, head football coach Monte Cater, head men's basketball coach Justin Namolik, head baseball coach Wayne Riser, and the women's lacrosse coach Tammy Butler were to attend the first-ever event.

No reasons were given for the caravans cancellation.

Safren Summer League

Safren Summer League enters its ninth year starting July 7. The basketball camp is for boys and girls entering 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th grades. SSL time: 6 to 8 p.m. on every Thursday in July. Counselors this year are 'Mister' Jennings, coach at Bluefield College, Dr. Brooke Miller, doctor of Defense", Coach James "JT" Thompson, CCHS Head Varsity Boys Basketball Coach and Hannah Safren, Shepherd University women's basketball player. The camp is free and is located at 20399 Miller Dr., Culpeper. Registration is limited. Call 829-9953.

Rams host Nike softball

June 23, 2011

From staff reports

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SHEPHERDSTOWN - Some of the top softball players from throughout the Mid-Atlantic Region will be taking part in the first Nike Softball Camp at Shepherd University next week.

"It's the first one in the region," Shepherd softball coach Leslie Lopez said. "It's some of the better athletes coming to these camps.

"We'll get a lot of travel-ball players in this camp."

Lopez said the camp will be "more all-inclusive, more hands on and there will be a lot of game situations."

Shepherd coaches and some players will provide the instruction.

Lopez said some 24 athletes have signed up so far for the camp that runs from Sunday through Thursday.

It is for players 10-18.

There is an overnight camp at a cost of \$495, an extended camp at \$395 and a day camp at \$295.

Campers can register up until the day of the event by going to the website ussportscamps.com/softball or by calling 1-800-NIKECAMP.

Journal celebrates talent overflow

The All-J.A.Y.s winners announced tonight at Martinsburg Mall

By ERIC JONES
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

MARTINSBURG — It's never an easy decision trying to determine the recipients of The Journal's top honors with the numerous standout athletes and successful coaches in the area.

That's because there's so much talent in the Eastern Panhandle, from the fall season through the spring season.

This year alone, there were five state team champions — Martinsburg football, Musselman volleyball, Berkeley Springs girls track, Jefferson boys track and Jefferson baseball — along with Faith Christian's boys and girls track teams winning the Association of Christian



Schools International's East Regional title and Shepherd football winning its first Super Region One title and advancing to the NCAA Division II semifinals.

As hard as it was, the decision has been made, and tonight, the winners will be announced during The Journal's All-J.A.Y.s celebration at 7 p.m. at the Martinsburg Mall.

Like past years, the all-area teams, including each sport's top athlete, and athletes of the week will be honored for their work.

On top of that, there were a number of individual state champions, making this area one of the most successful in the state.

See ALL-J.A.Y.S C2

ALL-J.A.Y. FINALISTS

Coach of the Year
Monte Cater, Shepherd
Darin Grim, Faith Christian
Craig Hunter, Jefferson
John Lowery, Sr., Jefferson
Shawn Martz, Musselman
Dave Munday, B. Springs
David Walker, Martinsburg

Female Athlete of the Year
Nicole Deneseus, Faith Christian
Jasmyn Hosby, Martinsburg
Nichole Pitcock, Shepherd
Harlie Stotler, Berkeley Springs
Michelle Williams, B. Springs

Male Athlete of the Year
Brandon Doughty, Jefferson
Nick Lopez, Martinsburg
Nathan Minnich, Shepherd
Keon Robinson, Shepherd
Zach Wise, Berkeley Springs

All-J.A.Y.s FROM PAGE C1

The event will conclude with the handing out of the three big awards — the ALL-J.A.Y.s Female Athlete of the Year, ALL-J.A.Y.s Male Athlete of the Year and ALL-J.A.Y.s Coach of the Year.

The nominees for male athlete of the year are Jefferson's Brandon Doughty, Shepherd's Nathan Minnich and Keon Robinson, Martinsburg's Nick Lopez and Berkeley Springs' Zach Wise.

The female athlete of the

year nominees are Faith Christian's Nicole Deneseus, Martinsburg's Jasmyn Hosby, Shepherd's Nichole Pitcock and Berkeley Springs' Harlie Stotler and Michelle Williams.

Doughty and Hosby were players of the year in two sports, while Deneseus and Stotler shared the award for field athlete of the year.

Finally, the coach of the year nominees are Shepherd football coach Monte Cater, Faith Christian track coach

Darin Grim, Jefferson boys track coach Craig Hunter and baseball coach John Lowery, Musselman volleyball coach Shawn Martz, Berkeley Springs girls track coach Dave Munday and Martinsburg football coach David Walker.

This year's list of coaching nominees went from the normal five to seven, because of the huge amount of success each had. Four coaches, Cater, Grim, Munday and Walker, led their teams to program firsts,

while Hunter, Martz and Lowery added to their school's trophy cases.

Only three will receive The Journal's top honor in their respective categories, but it was a collective effort among the area's athletes and coaches that made this past sports season one of the Panhandle's best.

— Eric Jones can be reached at 304-263-3381, ext. 234, or ejones@journal-news.net



Journal photo by Ron Agre
Martinsburg football coach David Walker displays his 2011 All-J.A.Y.s Coach of the Year trophy at the eighth annual All J.A.Y.s Awards Celebration Wednesday evening at the Martinsburg Mall.

All-J.A.Y.s snapshot



Journal photo by Ron Agre
From top, Faith Christian's Nicole Deneseus accepts the 2011 Female Field Co-Athlete of the Year award from Ben Guell at the eighth annual All J.A.Y.s Awards Celebration Wednesday at the Martinsburg Mall. Jefferson's Lindsey Hash accepts her Girls Cross Country Runner of the Year award. Washington's Roland Rush receives his Journal Field Athlete of the Year award from Guell.

Walker, Hosby, Robinson nab Journal's top honors

Area sports hit all-time high in 2010-11

By Eric Jones
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

MARTINSBURG — In the end, it comes down to the players on the field making plays as to how successful a team is.

However, a team's success begins with the leadership of its coach.

The perfect example of that is Martinsburg coach Dave Walker, who led his Bulldogs to their first state football championship amid of number of unwarranted circumstances and unwanted distractions.

Walker's job on and off the field with Martinsburg won him the ALL-J.A.Y.s Coach of the Year award during The Journal's ALL-J.A.Y.s celebration Wednesday night at the Martinsburg Mall.

Walker beat out six other championship-caliber coaches — Shepherd football coach Monte Cater, Faith Christian track coach Darin Grimm, Jefferson boys track coach Craig Hunter, Jefferson baseball coach John Lowery, Musselman volleyball coach Shawn Martz and Berkeley Springs girls track coach Dave Munday — for the event's final award of the evening.

"It means we had a great season," Walker said. "Even though it's an individual award, it's really a team award. Our seniors we had,



Journal photo by Ron Agre
Shepherd football coach Monte Cater, left, accepts the All-J.A.Y.s Male Athlete of the Year award from Journal sports editor Rick Kozlowski, right, for Ram cornerback Keon Robinson Wednesday at the Martinsburg Mall.

and there weren't that many, they did a great job of leading this team, as did a lot of our juniors. We had a great group of guys, and I'm really proud of all of them."

All seven of the coaching nominees combined for eight titles.

"It's a privilege to be with the rest of the nominees," Walker

said. Martinsburg was represented well also in the male athlete of the year and female athlete of the year categories, with Nick Lopez and Jasmyrn Hosby up for their respective awards.

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Honors

FROM PAGE D1

Hosby, a standout basketball player and state-champion runner, picked up the award, beating out Faith Christian's Nicole Deneseus, Shepherd's Nichole Pitcock and Berkeley Springs' Harlie Stotler and Michelle Williams.

Hosby led the Bulldogs to the state tournament in basketball, then won two gold medals as Martinsburg's girls track team finished in the runner-up spot.

Lopez was a nominee, along with Jefferson's Brandon Doughty, Shepherd's Nathan Minnich and Keon Robinson and Berkeley Springs' Zach Wise.

Robinson, who will be a junior, took home the award after finishing as an All-American cornerback for the Rams' football team. He led all of NCAA Division II with 10 interceptions and helped lead Shepherd to its first Super Region One title and first spot in the national semifinals.

Cater accepted on Robin-

son's behalf, given a nod to the rest of the male nominees and saying about his star defender, "we're glad to have him back."

A large crowd also watched as members of the all-area teams, as well as The Journal/Gold's Gym Athletes of the Week, were also honored for their achievements.

The ceremony officially brought an end to one of the, if not the best sports seasons the Eastern Panhandle has ever seen. From high school to college, it was an all-around success for teams in the area.

With fall sports just around the corner, players and coaches are gearing up for another remarkable sports season.

Although, it will be hard to the accomplishments of 2010-2011.

— Eric Jones can be reached at 304-263-3381, ext. 234, or ejones@journal-news.net

ALL-J.A.Y. MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

KEON ROBINSON Shepherd Football

SHEPHERDSTOWN – For only being a sophomore, Keon Robinson has already built quite a resume.

Two years into his college career, the Shepherd cornerback already has been honored several times over for his work on the defensive side of the ball. Now he's being honored as the *The Journal's* All-J.A.Y. Male Athlete of the Year.

During a record-setting year that included finishing with a school-best 12-2 mark and advancing to the NCAA Division II semifinals, Robinson was forced to step into a starting role early.

With two-time all-American Deante Steele injured, Robinson, the heir-apparent at cornerback, stepped up and filled Steele's shoes nicely.

Robinson, a converted wide receiver, intercepted 10 passes, the most in NCAA Division II football, en route to receiving All-America status and collecting conference and regional honors.

To Shepherd's defense, Robinson was all-everything – a shutdown cornerback and sure-fire tackler.



Besides his nation-leading 10 picks, he also recorded 65 tackles, including a team-best 59 solo tackles, and had two interception returns for touchdowns.

Robinson was all over the place,

also returning kickoffs and punts, and it wasn't long before teams around the conference and throughout the region took notice of the 5-foot-11, 187-pound defensive back.

He had a couple big games during

the Rams' playoff run, starting with the second-round contest against Kutztown, Pa. Down 27-19, Robinson returned a kickoff 97 yards for a touchdown, starting a string of three straight scores by Shepherd as it

took a 41-27 lead and went on to win by a touchdown. The kickoff return was the second-longest in program history. Defensively, he finished with a game-high 11 tackles.

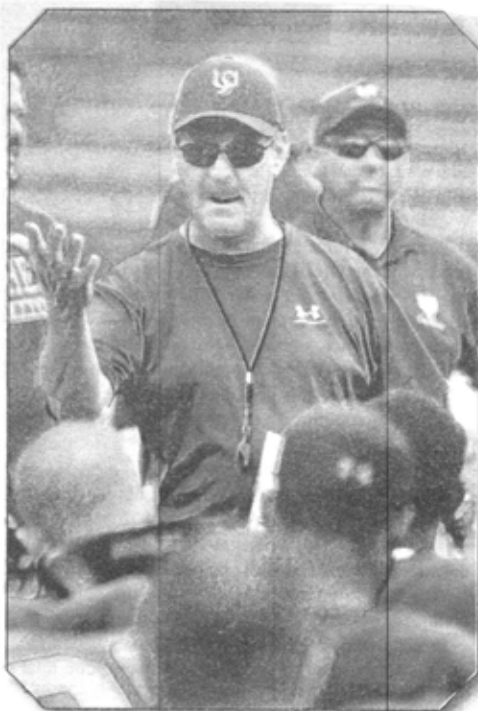
In the Super Region One title game, Robinson had three tackles and an interception, which the Rams followed with a touchdown drive.

The season ended with a loss to Delta State in the national semifinals, but Robinson's was just beginning.

Besides being an all-WVC defensive first-team selection, Robinson also was named to the 2010 Daktronics NCAA Division II all-Super Region One first team and the 2010 Don Hansen NCAA Division II all-Super Region One first team.

Then, he was a second-team selection on the 2010 Daktronics NCAA Division II All-America Team, the AP Little All-America Team, the 2010 Don Hansen NCAA Division II All-America Team and the D2football.com All-America Team.

—Eric Jones



MONTE CATER
Shepherd

Monte Cater has won more games than any other football coach in West Virginia Conference history.

He's won more championships than any other football coach in the WVC.

He's accomplished all of that with a scholarship budget that is the least-funded in the league.

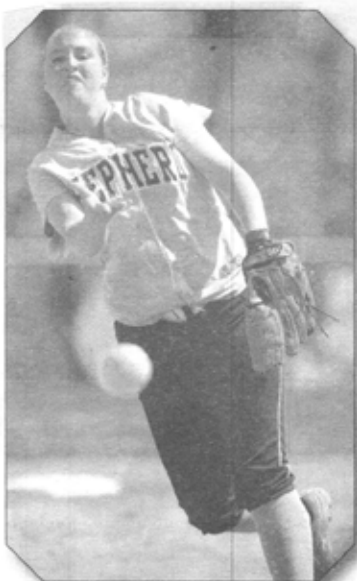
Cater did something this past season he's never done in 38 years — lose his mustache, courtesy of a bet he lost — or won? — with his team for claiming the conference championship.

Oh, and he did something else he nor anybody else at Shepherd has done — win an NCAA-Division II regional championship on his third try and advance to the school's first national semifinal game.

They lost that game, a competitive contest, at Delta State to end the greatest season in Shepherd football history at 12-2.

Along the way, the Rams found some magic during games that at certain points might've seemed unwinnable, like an amazing comeback during the regular season against West Liberty and in the playoffs against top-seeded Kutztown in the Super Region I semifinals.

Shepherd hammered Mercyhurst in the regional championship game on a cold afternoon in Erie, Pa., leading to one more new experience — the traditional celebratory dunking, pulled off with a water cooler full of snow.



NICHOLE PITCOCK
Shepherd

Nichole Pitcock broke records and led by example during Shepherd University's softball campaign in 2011.

And then came the awards: The Daktronics All-American honorable mention, All-Region first-team selection and All West Virginia Conference first-team honors.

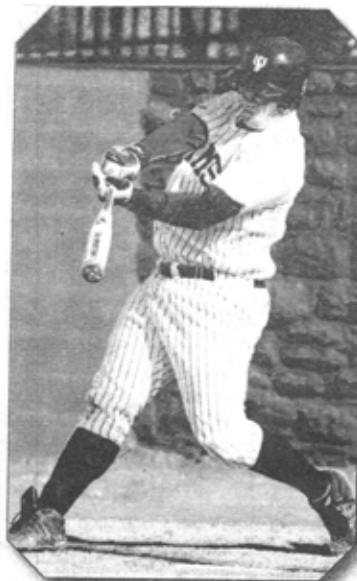
The senior pitcher/first baseman shattered Shepherd University records on the mound and led the team at the plate as the Rams posted a 32-15 record with a 20-5 conference mark.

Pitcock set a single-season record, appearing in 23 games. She struck out a record 187 batters in 179 innings on the mound and posted an earned run average of 1.61.

Pitcock also tied teammate Tricia Bettura's record for most appearances in a season with 32. The season helped set career pitching records for wins (57), appearances (107), complete games (61), innings pitched (539.2) and strikeouts (443).

Pitcock also led the Rams in runs batted in with 35, while being plated 16 times in 2011 as part of a .314 hitting season with 44 hits in 140 at-bats.

She also was among team leaders in home runs (3), total bases (58), sacrifice flies (2), doubles (5) and plate appearances (147).



NATHAN MINNICH
Shepherd

Shepherd has had a long line of talented hitters during coach Wayne Riser's tenure.

Then there's Nathan Minnich, who experienced a wave of awards like no other Ram.

The Rams' junior designated hitter received just about every conference and regional award and was in the running for a national award.

Minnich led Shepherd in seven different categories, posting team highs in batting average (.433), slugging percentage (.858), RBI (38), runs (42), home runs (14), walks (28) and total bases (103).

Those numbers also were among the conference, region and nation's best, resulting in Minnich being named the West Virginia Conference Co-Player of the Year as the league's best hitter. He also was named regional player of the year three different times and became the first Ram to be a first-team all-American, as he was named to the 2011 Daktronics NCAA Division II Baseball All-America Team.

Minnich's year got him noticed on a national scale as one of eight nominees for the 2011 Tino Martinez Division II Player of the Year. He finished eighth in the voting.

He was among the leaders in Division II, ranking third in on-base percentage, fourth in home runs per game, fourth in slugging percentage and eighth in batting average. He also was tied for 12th in home runs.

Shepherd athletic camps underway

POSTED: July 1, 2011

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The 2011 Shepherd University Summer Athletics Sports Camps are in full swing. Several camp opportunities are still available this summer. Advertisement

For more information about these camps and to register your camper, go to www.shepherdbook.com or call 304-876-5219. There is a limit on the number of campers for each camp.

July 6-8: Softball Fundamentals Camp, \$100

July 11-13: Boys Volleyball Night Camp, \$75

July 11-14: Baseball Hitting Camp, \$100

July 11-14: Girls Volleyball Day Camp, \$215

July 18-21: Baseball Hitting Camp, \$100

July 18-22: Boys' Basketball Day Camp, \$165

July 25-28: Baseball Hitting Camp, \$100

July 26-28: Girls Volleyball High Intensity Camp, Non-residential rate of \$285 and a residential rate of \$335 applies.

SU to induct athletes

POSTED: July 1, 2011

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The Shepherd University Athletic Hall of Fame will induct four new members this fall at the annual Advertisement induction banquet on Friday, Sept. 16 at the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center in Shepherdstown.

Football standout Mark Brower, '84; Darren Iden, '89 (men's tennis); and Tara Saville, '95 (volleyball); join Adam Straskulic, '01 (baseball); as the 26th class to be inducted. The "fantastic four" bring the total number of members in the Shepherd Athletic Hall of Fame to 125.

The quartet also will be honored at the Shepherd-Seton Hill football game on Saturday, Sept. 17 as part of Hall of Fame Weekend festivities.

Brower was a four-year starter on the Shepherd football team from 1980-83. A two-time First Team All-WVIAC choice, Brower was named WVIAC Defensive Player of the Year in 1983 as he helped lead Shepherd to its second consecutive WVIAC title. He helped anchor a Shepherd defense that allowed only 71 points in 10 games in 1982. An Honorable Mention NAIA All-American as a senior, Brower led the Rams in sacks for three straight years and finished his career as the program's all-time sack leader with 29.5 sacks.

Iden was a standout on the Shepherd men's tennis team in 1984 and from 1987-89. He played at number one in both singles and doubles play throughout his career and

finished his career as the program's all-time wins leader with a 104-50 career

mark. Iden teamed with Kevin Fiery to win the WVIAC number one doubles title to

help lead the Rams to the WVIAC crown in 1988. In 1989, he captured the number

one singles and doubles (with Ferran Macipe) titles en route to gaining WVIAC

Player of The Year honors.

Saville was a four-year starter for the Shepherd volleyball team from 1991-94. Saville

gained All-WVIAC honors all four years for the Rams and was twice a First Team

honoree. A two-time team captain, Saville led the Rams in attack percentage in three seasons and topped the team in kills and digs for two seasons.

Straskulic was a four-year standout for the Shepherd baseball team from 1998-2001. He led the Rams to three WVIAC Northern Division titles. A three-time All-WVIAC choice,

Straskulic gained First Team All-Conference and Second Team All-Region honors as a senior.

He finished his career with 10 program records and still holds Shepherd records for most triples in a season (6,

2000) and most career triples (17).

The Athletic Hall of Fame banquet will begin with a social hour at 6 p.m., followed

by the dinner and induction ceremony at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$35 and may be purchased through the University's Office of Alumni Relations by calling 304-876-5157.

The End Zone

July 5, 2011

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Editor's note: Please note that all announcements are published in the order received. Some entries may be edited based on available space. All items should be received by 4 p.m. Sunday of each week and can be submitted by email at sports@journal-news.net, via The Journal's Virtual Newsroom or website (www.journal-news.net). Please put "end zone" in the subject line of emails. We cannot guarantee any item will run.

BASEBALL

Second season

Martinsburg Little League is offering Second Season Baseball for players ages 5-13 as of April 30.

Five-year-old players must have played at least one year of tee-ball.

All players must live within the league boundaries, and new players must include a photocopy of a state birth certificate and three proofs of residence.

Forms can be picked up up at Oatesdale Park from 1-4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday and from 6-8 p.m. July 11-14.

For more details, visit www.martinsburglittleleague.com or call 304-267-7359.

The season will begin in August.

Shepherd camps

Shepherd University will be hosting three weekly baseball camps beginning on July 11, 18 and 25.

The camp is open to players ages 10-15.

To register, go to www.shepherdbook.com.

BASKETBALL

Gym rental

Martinsburg-Berkeley County Parks and Recreation is offering open-gym basketball from 3-5 p.m.

The cost is \$2 per person, and only cash will be accepted for admission.

AAU tournament

The Max Exposure Shootout will be held this weekend in Martinsburg.

The tournament is open to boys and girls 12U-17U, and the fee is \$250 per team.

To enter, email aaufire@hotmail.com.

FOOTBALL

Upward league

registration

Oakland Church is accepting registration for Upward Football League, open to boys and girls ages 8-12.

Steady stroke: Minnich thrives on consistent play




[View larger image](#)

Nathan Minnich watches the flight of a long fly ball against Strasburg. Dennis Grundman/Daily

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By Jeff Nations -- jnations@nvdaily.com

It's hard to imagine Nathan Minnich having to prove his ability to hit a baseball.

The 6-foot-3, 253-pound rising senior from Shepherd University looks every bit the part of a barrel-chested masher at the plate. And his college numbers have backed up that impression for three straight seasons now -- double-digit homers as a freshman (11), sophomore (12) and junior (14) for the Rams.

Yet after that freshman season, in which Minnich posted dazzling offensive numbers, including a .376 batting average, 11 homers and 32 RBIs, he had no invitation waiting to play collegiate summer baseball. No contract awaited Minnich after a sophomore season which produced an ugly line of .425, 12 homers and 44 RBIs.

Both summers, Minnich had to be content with playing summer baseball in an adult league near his hometown of Waynesboro, Pa. But Minnich finally did get a shot at collegiate summer ball shortly before his junior season at Shepherd, thanks to the inevitable roster openings in the Valley League as the season winds down.

It helps having a coach on the Winchester Royals staff, as well. That's how Minnich became a late-season fill-in for the Royals in 2010, when then-Royals assistant Matt McCarty -- also an assistant at Shepherd -- talked Minnich into joining the Royals for the final 16 games of the regular season. Truth be told, Minnich didn't need much convincing.

"It's an awesome league," said Minnich, a first baseman/designated hitter now in his second season with the Royals. "It's every level of college -- you've got D1, D2, D3, NAIA, junior colleges -- it's just awesome. You've got the best guys, not the worst guys, off every team."

Then again, Winchester manager John Lowery didn't need much convincing, either.

"We were looking for somebody who could swing the bat a little bit, and Nate obviously fills that bill," Lowery said. "Nate's reputation in the tri-state area as a baseball player dating back to high school is well documented. So when the opportunity came along to get him, we jumped at that and he's certainly been a plus for us ever since."

That 2010 season marked a sort of tryout for Minnich, who responded by ripping four home runs -- including an unforgettable

three-homer, seven-RBI performance in a game against Woodstock. He finished his abbreviated stint with a respectable .245 average, four homers and 14 RBIs.

Minnich didn't have any shortage of suitors for a VBL return as a full-season player, but stuck with the Royals by signing a contract early last fall. He then proceeded to give any and all summer-league teams who missed out a fearsome preview of what was to come this summer.

When most collegiate hitters took a big step backward with the introduction of the new NCAA-mandated bats designed to more closely replicate wooden-bat performance, Minnich showed his power was all too legitimate. He batted .433 with 14 homers and 38 RBIs with a formidable .858 slugging percentage. He ranked nationally among Division II hitters in homers and slugging percentage, plus was third in on-base percentage (.553).

"Nate Minnich's one of the few college hitters where his numbers didn't drop off from previous years -- his got better," Shepherd coach Wayne Riser said. "We had guys in our league last year who hit as many homers as he did, then dropped to six or eight this year.

"I think the new bats helped Nate."

They did help Minnich gain national attention. He earned West Virginia Conference Player of the Year honors, but that was just the start. He garnered Atlantic Regional player of the year honors from both the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association (NCBWA) and ABCA/Rawlings, then was named an All-American on three separate teams -- Daktronics (first team), ABCA/Rawlings (second team) and NCBWA (third team).

The caper, though, was Minnich's selection as one of eight finalists for the Tino Martinez Division II Player of the Year Award.

"Just being nominated for that, before I even made it to the final eight, being one of the better players in Division II, is just an honor," Minnich said. "Coming into college, I never expected that one day I would have a chance to be voted as the best player in Division II baseball."

Finally, Minnich has the resume to match the look and numbers of a legitimate, light-tower power threat.

The awards are great, but Riser saw concrete proof of the respect Minnich commands at the plate during a conference game this season -- with the Rams' left-handed slugger up in a bases-loaded situation, Minnich drew an intentional walk to allow a run to score. For Riser, a 21-year veteran head coach at Shepherd, that was a first.

So far this season with the Royals, Minnich has carried over that collegiate success. He's currently batting .298 with team-highs of seven home runs (second in the VBL) and 24 RBIs, and is a big reason why the Royals lead the VBL's Northern Division with a 18-12 mark.

"When he gets in that groove, he can hit them a long way and he can hit them consecutively," Lowery said. "But the thing that's nice about him that maybe goes unnoticed a little bit is that he is willing to hit the ball the other way.

"He's not just a home run hitter. He has a nice swing at the plate and he has a good approach to hitting."

That may be so -- and the numbers back it up -- but Minnich will always be most feared as a home-run threat. And that's just fine with him.

"I hit 'em all," Minnich said. "Sometimes they go really far, sometimes they barely make it over the fence. It still looks the same in the books."