

John Carroll baseball says ‘a little prayer’ for absent teammate

BEL AIR - The John Carroll School baseball team started yelling and cheering on the back edge of the infield after recording the final out of a 9-3 victory over Mount St. Michael Academy (N.Y.) April 25. Then they all turned and ran toward the fence in right field, moving almost as one.

The Patriots ran and touched the sign with “25” on it and then stopped there for a moment. This is what they do after every home game. It’s a simple gesture really, but it keeps alive the memory of Josh Hamer, a teammate killed in a March 2017 car accident.

“He’s the 10th player on the field at all times,” John Carroll coach Darrion Siler said. “This is all player-driven. (It’s) totally them, finding ways they want to keep remembering.”

The John Carroll baseball program has kept his memory alive in other ways, one of which is coming up May 5, when the Patriots play St. Paul’s in the third annual Josh Hamer Memorial Scholarship Game at Leidos Field at Ripken Stadium in Aberdeen.

Proceeds from the 4 p.m. game go to a scholarship fund in Josh’s memory. Siler said that fund already has helped five baseball players come to John Carroll.

Siler said there are other things the Patriots do to honor the pitcher, who would have a member of the school’s class of 2019.

In addition to his number 25 in decals on helmets, jersey patches and the fence in right field, many players have it on the barrel of their bat. A flag with the number

flies behind the backstop, basically looking out over the field.

Running out to the “25” sign after the game has become a tradition for the Patriots, win or lose. They are simply reaching out to their friend.

“It’s like something physical to know that he’s there with us,” said catcher Stelio Stakias. “So, we go say a little prayer out there, touch the sign after every game, win or loss, just to (know) that he’s here with us. That sign’s not going anywhere.”

The players who competed with him truly feel that Hamer is still with them. Pitcher Brandon Crews did not know Hamer until his freshman year but also draws strength from that right-field sign.

“I always want to be sure that I know he’s behind me,” Crews said. “I know he’s behind me. (My) confidence goes up a lot, with him being with me and the John Carroll community behind everybody. It makes a huge difference.”

Crews said he wants to make sure that all of the incoming freshmen coming in know about Hamer, that the legacy remains alive.

Siler, Crews and Stakias all praised Hamer’s baseball talents. Despite being only a sophomore in 2017, he could throw a fastball at least in the mid-80 mph range, which is impressive for a high-schooler. Stakias said Hamer’s pitching repertoire also included a curve and change-up, and that he was working on a slider.

“He could have changed our team significantly,” Crews said.

Siler loved Hamer’s personality. He remembers him as the kind of high-schooler who would seek out someone at lunch who was sitting alone at a table, and join him or her.

“Awesome player, but most important, he was a good kid,” Siler said. “High-character kid; great smile and contagious laughter.”

All of that is why the Patriots are working to ensure the memory of Hamer lives on. It’s a big reason they’re playing in Sunday’s game. Last year’s game helped the scholarship fund, and Stakias and others helped with fundraising events last fall to bring in even more money.