

Prestigious POWER

Senior leadership leads to record-breaking season

"I'd never seen a team hit the ball like this," Iowa High School Baseball Hall of Famer and current AD Joe Nelson said.

"This is the best hitting team I've seen in all my years of coaching," head coach Michael Barta said.

"The combination of power and contact this team possesses is something people will talk about for years to come," assistant coach Tom Steffes said.

The team lived up to the hype. One reason was graduated senior first baseman Peyton Williams.

Going into his third at-bat in a home game vs Ankeny Centennial, Williams had already hit one home run in the first inning. He was up to an absurd seven home runs through eight games (25 at-bats). "I never go into a game thinking about hitting home runs," he said, "I just want to make good contact and try to get on base." Centennial junior Cameron Kuehl threw Williams a fastball that he crushed over the right-field wall. This moment embodied what this team will be remembered for. Prestigious power and a senior class which was one of the best in state history.

After a crushing loss at state as the one seed last year, there was no need for motivation. The seniors wanted a shot at redemption and to leave as champions. "Nobody wants to lose at state, especially in the way we did, so we wanted to make sure that we didn't feel the sting of not winning a single game at Principal (Park)," graduated senior Andrew Nord said.

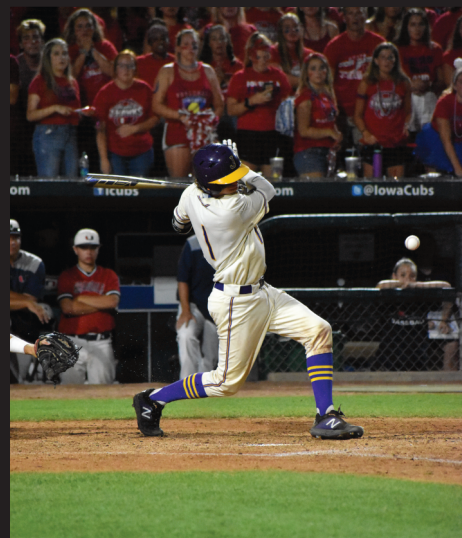
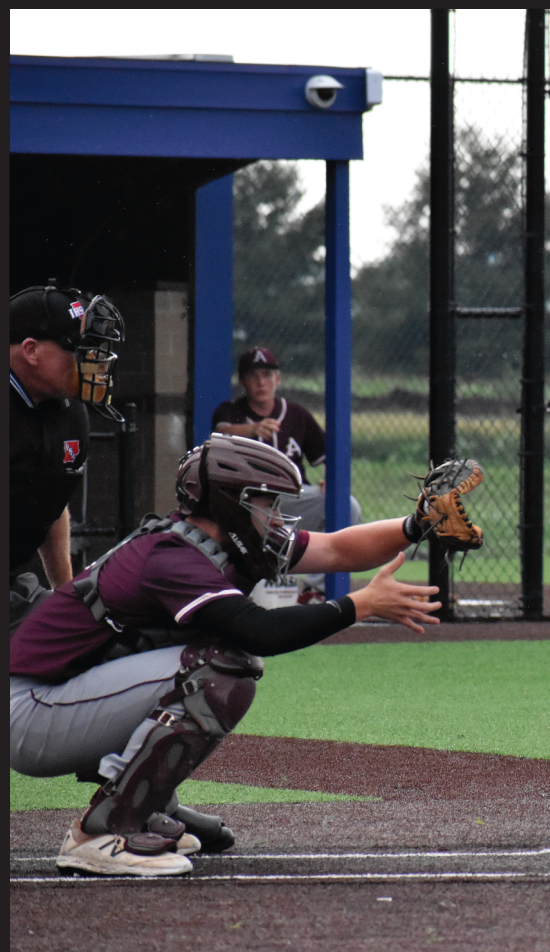
The first step to this was hosting a sub-state. Johnston did just that getting the number one overall seed in the state. Beating teams by an average of 9.5 runs, Johnston was crushing the ball. "We had 33 homers in the regular season," Williams said. "We slugged over .600. It was just something where everything clicked. We were just crushing the ball."

After cruising through substate winning both games by run rules, and beating Ankeny (6-0) and Dowling Catholic (7-0), the state title game was set. Johnston vs Urbandale.

A few key errors in the first few innings cost Johnston. They lost to the crosstown rival 2-8. "The part that really sucked is that (sophomore) Gabe Swansen would have had a grand slam and a three-run homer at any other park in Iowa except the Ankeny schools and Principal Park," Barta said. "Urbandale just hit a bunch of bloop singles and that's how you win at Principal."

Yet that will not be the legacy the team leaves behind. Johnston set 21 school records in hitting. The pitching staff, while never considered a state-best, was sporting the second-lowest ERA (2.02) in 4A. Johnston led the state and 4A in eight hitting categories. The senior class went 150-25. Out of the 12 seniors, seven will play college baseball including five D1 players (Peyton Williams, Andrew Nord, Jackson Vines and Jacob Tobey all at Iowa and Reece Anderson at South Dakota State, Cade Moss at Kirkwood, Jacob May at Wartburg and Ben Shaver at Iowa Central.)

Barta called this group one of the great leadership groups to ever play baseball. Some may think losing in the title game will make this class less, but assistant coach Quinn O'Brien said it best after the loss. "I know this may hurt right now, but the score of a baseball game doesn't define who you are. You are all so much more than the score, you are all amazing players and people."



As the Urbandale student section looks on, graduated senior Cade Moss fouls off a pitch. Moss started at catcher for the past two years, becoming one of the greatest contact hitters to come through the program. He holds the single season program record for hits (65) and batting average (.504), as well as the career records in batting average (.453) and on-base percentage (.525). He continued his baseball career at Kirkwood Community College. Photo by: Julia Merritt

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