

Graduate Trevor McCauley springs forward, catching a throw to first to finalize a double play against Ankeny Centennial July 10. During the state finals, McCauley's brother Ryan, a member of the Dragons 2008 40-0 team, unexpectedly returned from a wedding in New York to watch his brother win the championship.

Photo by Tyler Fenton



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1. Hitting a sacrifice bunt, graduate Sam Schade bolts off toward first base. The purpose of a sacrifice bunt is to get the runner on first or second base further into scoring position, while allowing the hitter to be tagged out.

Photo by Tyler Fenton

2. Junior Nick Stitzell sprints down the baseline and slides safely into second base. "Coach had us stealing bases on our catchers and we couldn't go home until we successfully stole a set number of times," Stitzell said.

Photo by Tyler Fenton

3. Graduate Alex McCune hurtles the ball toward the catcher against Des Moines East. "[Pitching] for me is all about deception and keeping the batter guessing," McCune said. "If you become predictable, you won't succeed."

Photo by Tyler Fenton

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HAVIN'

a BALL

A small, orange sphere energizes the baseball team

The crowd was dead quiet, the pressure was on and sophomore Sergio Alaniz was up to the plate. The semifinals of the IHSAA State Tournament against Des Moines East had been a struggle through the first five innings.

There were two outs in the top of the fifth, bases loaded, dugout seats emptied and the team was glued to the fence watching Alaniz. The small, orange ball the team called the Energy Ball rolled across the floor, forgotten.

The Energy Ball was a symbol thrown into motion by assistant coach Tom Steffes. "We got the idea after a rough series with Ames," head coach Michael Barta said. "When it came out we didn't lose much the rest of the year. It was a reminder to the guys that every pitch, every inning, every game is really important."

The ball roused the team off the bench and helped turn around the season. "We realized that we played better as a team when we were on our feet

and had a lot of energy in the dugout," graduate Trevor McCauley said. "Everyone is yelling and chanting, getting into the other pitcher's head. It gets everyone's head in the game."

Barta felt the ball did the job it intended to. "Seeing the ball at work is interesting. It gives the guys that aren't playing in the game a vital role, and that really makes a difference," Barta said. "I think people really underestimate how important the energy made by those guys is."

By the state tournament held at Principal Park, the energy ball had become a catalyst for internal excitement and the team had advanced farther than any team in the past four years.

In the fifth inning of the semifinals, Alaniz, who was subbing for graduate Michael Kinning, was up to bat. DSM East pitcher Colby Carmichael, let loose his pitch, and Alaniz sent it sailing into left field for a single.

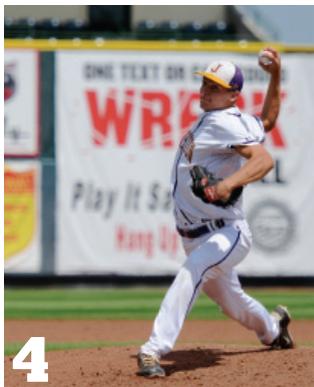
"Seeing the guys drop five more

runs after my hit was intense," Alaniz said. "I just knew I had to get up there and start to get things done, so I just let the bat do the work."

The team scored five runs versus East's two, propelling the Dragons into the championship game. In the final, Johnston beat the Sioux City East Black Raiders with 9-2, becoming the third baseball team in school history to be state champions.

"Winning state was a dream of mine ever since my brother won in 2008," McCauley said. "It was the greatest feeling in the world. I couldn't possibly think of a better way to end my senior season."

Just after graduate Alex McCune struck out the opposing team's short-stop, Jake Westfall, the crowd erupted into cheers, the pressure transformed into a surge of happiness, and the entire team was on the field piled up in a massive mound of sheer excitement and pure joy.



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PITCHER: CHASE KRAMER '15

"When I pitch, I have to know which pitches are working and which aren't."



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CATCHER: DREW WOODS '14

"As a catcher, I have to be aware of all of the things going on in the infield."

4. In the wind-up of his throw, graduate Joe Hawks lunges forward to propel the ball down the lane. "Knowing what pitch to throw at different points in the count is the most difficult part of being a pitcher," Hawks said. "Striking them out, though, is the best part."

Photo by Tyler Fenton

5. The team holds up the championship trophy awarded to them after beating Sioux City East in the state championship. "Touching the trophy was really emotional," graduate Miles Fogelson said. "It was the culmination of all the hard work we put in coming out all at once."

Photo by Tyler Fenton



Photos by Tyler Fenton

baseball **13**

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