

Leroy counts on 'new guys'

BY TOMMY HICKS

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With only four returning starters on the roster, some might think Leroy's successful run in baseball in recent seasons could hit a bump in the road. But that's not the way head coach Matt Braun sees the season unfolding.

"We lost a lot from last year's team," he said. "We lost a lot of leadership and we've got to have some new guys step up for us. As always, we play a very challenging schedule and there's going to be some good teams in our area that are going to challenge us. A lot of teams in this area are going to be improved and there's not going to be many days where we don't have to play really well to win. We're going to have some inexperience but those are guys who are going to have to play well in a hurry if we are going to continue to have the success that we've had."

The four returning players are Solomon Foster, Kade Moseley, Chase Pugh and Trey Pearce. "We're going to count on them pretty heavily," Braun admits. "All of them are going to pitch, and that's probably the strength of our club in that Moseley and Foster and Pugh all have pitched significantly since they were freshmen. All of those guys have really good career records and that's pitching two years as underclassmen. Now that they are juniors we are expecting really big things out of them on the mound."

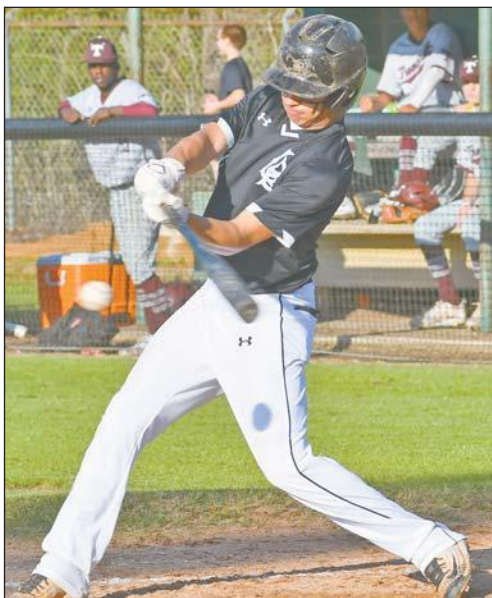
"Those three guys are also multi-positional, they can play anywhere on the field and all have played both infield and outfield for us at different times. Now that they are juniors their pitch count is at 120 instead of 100 and they're going to be able to go deeper into ball games, they are going to have a carry a big load for us if we're going to win."

"We're going to have to find a way to score runs with only four experienced hitters back and the rest of our guys are going to have to really step up and find ways to get on base and score. Those three guys are going to be responsible for keeping games close while our offense is trying to find our identity."

It's the intangibles the players on this year's roster bring to the table that has Braun excited about the season.

"One of the things I like about our kids is we have some good character kids and they'll work hard, and if you work hard at it you've got a chance to be successful. As the season goes along I think we've got some guys who can possibly work their way into being good offensive players. After about the fourth guy in the lineup we're going to have to be scrappy."

"I think we've got a chance to be pretty dang good defensively. We have some question marks in the outfield but we have some guys who can step up and be good there. Those four returning guys are left-handed hitters — Moseley is a



Leroy's Solomon Foster

switch hitter but he ended up hitting left-handed most of the time last year. We've got a lefty-heavy lineup that may give (opposing) pitchers some trouble."

Leroy has been ranked No. 1 in the state at some point in each of the past two seasons and three seasons ago the Bears were ranked No. 2 most of the season but didn't reach the playoffs because Mobile Christian and St. Luke's got in.

"I fully expect us to line up and compete every time we take the field. ... We have enough talent to where if we play really hard and we're coachable then I think we've got a chance to have a good season," Braun said. "But it's not going to be easy for us, we're going to have to fight. But our kids like to fight and compete, so it could be a fun year for us."

Other players who will likely play key roles for the Bears include Andin Cunningham (P/1B), Grant Massey (P), Drake Keith (OF, 3B), Logan Sellers (OF), Cooper Cartee (OF), Spike Vice (2B), Aaron Stearns (C), Malcolm Pugh (OF) and Jonte Peoples.



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