BASEBALL/SOFTBALL SPOTLIGHT ——





While the GCHS Wildcats did return a few top players from last year's squad, this season's roster is loaded with young players like sophomore Collin Pipkins, shown here putting a ball in play at Oak Grove. The Cats are depending on young players like Pipkins, sophomore first baseman Phillip Herring and others to make big contributions this season.



Wildcats

away with a lot to be happy about moving forward.

"I was extremely pleased with what I saw (at Oak Grove)," Chatham said. "The main thing is that our pitchers threw strikes and allowed just one walk the entire day."

"The guys battled, scrapped and kept their composure. Being as inexperienced as we were going into the game I think it was a great learning experience and confidence booster. I think by the end of the year when we are in those 1-run games, we will win them."

The newfound confidence was on display in the team's home opener last Friday in a rematch with the Rebels. They jumped out to an early 3-run lead and cruised to an 8-0 win thanks to nearly spotless defense, a phenomenal pitching performance and aggressiveness at the plate.

The Wildcats hammered out 10 hits in the contest. including two home runs. In the field, GCHS didn't allow a walk and committed on one error and that was by senior pitcher Jackson Turner who was nearly flawless otherwise.

They followed that win with a 6-2 victory at Citronelle on Saturday. They weren't as sure handed on the defensive side, but got a big showing out of junior pitcher Garrett Henderson, who went the distance.

"We really needed a couple

of big wins," Chatham told the Herald on Saturday. "It really felt good to get that are going to be thrown into one last night over George County."

"Hopefully we can keep this momentum."

The Cats got another boost at home on Monday with a 1-0 win over Resurrection Catholic. The only hit in the game came in the bottom of the sixth inning and the Cats parlayed the Jackson Dueitt single into the winning run. But the star of the show was the outstanding pitching performance by GCHS sophomore Collin Pipkins, who was close to perfect in his first-ever varsity start.

The win pushed the Wildcats' record to 3-3 and established Pipkins as a key part of the pitching rotation.

That is good timing as things aren't going to get any easier for GCHS moving forward as the Cats have a very challenging non-region schedule on top of playing in one of the state's strongest regions. Of their 19 nonregion games on the schedule 13 are against 5A or 6A schools. Ten of the games are against programs that have played for a state championship in the past five seasons. Toss in region matchups with the likes of Sumrall, Purvis, Poplarville and Forrest Count AHS and it is easy to see it is not a schedule for the weak at

"It is definitely a rugged

schedule," Chatham said. "We have a lot of guys that the fire against some very good competition."

"If we can continue to improve and stay focused and healthy, I think we will be very prepared when region play gets underway."

Chatham's five seniors are optimistic as well.

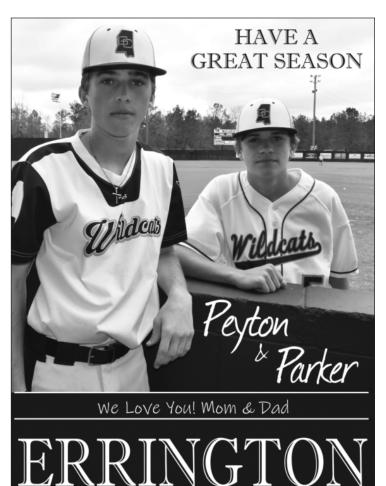
GCHS traveled Northeast Jones on Tuesday (results not available at press time) and will take on 6A Brandon at Jones College on Friday. They will take on a highly-touted Vancleave team in a home-and-away series next week and host

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Bay High next Saturday in their final warm-up before kicking off region play at home against Purvis on March 16.

They will mix in Saturday matchups with East Central and Pascagoula between region series with FCAHS and Sumrall. They will get a Saturday off the first week of April before wrapping up region play with a series with Poplarville.

They will wrap up the season with games against Laurel, Taylorsville, West Jones (2) and Resurrection in matchups Chatham hopes will be preparation for another post-season run.



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