



Defensive

Continued from Page 2-C

appearances that would be a huge plus for the Wildcats.

“Brayden throws a lot of strikes and is just a real competitor out there on the mound,” Chatham said.

Brewer gave up just two hits in two innings of work, but took the loss against Oak Grove. He bounced back last Tuesday with a strong 5-inning outing against the Rebels in Lucedale. Brewer struck out nine batters and didn’t allow an earned run in the matchup.

Ethan Roberts is a junior with JV experience that will be in the mix in 2021, most likely as a reliever. He was solid in two and a third innings of work against George County, but took the loss. He gave up just one hit and one earned run, while striking out three.

Heading into Monday’s matchup at home against Resurrection Catholic, sophomore Collin Pipkins was viewed as an up-and-comer that could possibly work his way into some varsity innings. After the show he put on his first varsity start, it may be hard to keep the youngster off the mound.

Pipkins threw a complete-game no-hitter against the Eagles, striking out 13, including the final RCS hitter he faced. Pipkins carried a perfect game through five and two thirds innings, but ended up having to work out of a jam after two infield errors and a hit batter. The latter might have been the only bad pitch he threw all night.

“We were expecting Collin to get more involved in the rotation as the season progresses,” Chatham said. “The way he pitched tonight gives us a lot of confidence in him moving forward.”

Meanwhile, expect Chatham and his longtime pitching coach Dale Kimble to start developing younger players for the pitching rotation of the future.

“We have a very young and inexperienced pitching staff,” Kimble said. “The key will be being able to locate our pitches and throw our off-speed pitches for strikes.”

Regardless of who is on the mound for the Wildcats, the defense is going to have to step up and make plays. Thus far, GCHS has done a pretty solid job in that area and Chatham is hopeful his team can continue to do so.

One interesting issue for GCHS is that all but one of the team’s top six pitchers is also a starter on defense. So not only are these guys going to have to be able to change gears to rotate from the mound back to their normal positions, several are going to have to master multiple positions in the field to be able to cover for each other.

For example, Jackson Dueitt is penciled in as the everyday starter in right field, but when he is on the mound, someone is going to have to rotate over to his outfield spot. The same applies for starting center fielder Gannon Henderson.

“It is something you deal with every year in high school baseball, but it is going to be more of an issue for us this year than normally,” Chatham said. “We are working to create depth and get everyone comfortable with moving around a little.”

Dueitt and Henderson will be the mainstays in the outfield. Henderson was the team’s left fielder last year and has the speed and athleticism to cover a lot of ground in the outfield. Dueitt is a smart player who has come on strong with his defensive skills.

Senior Dawson Thornton is the team’s number one utility player and will see playing time at several positions in the outfield and infield this year. He did not play last year, but Chatham said he has worked very hard to make up the lost ground and will be a big part of the GCHS defense this year.

Senior Cole Hillman and juniors Keaton Hollinghead and Parker Errington are all competing for playing time at left field and will all likely see time at other spots throughout the season.

out the season.

The infield is anchored by junior shortstop Brayden Brewer, one of the few returning starters from last season. He will be flanked to the left by sophomore second baseman Collin Pipkins and to the right by junior Ethan Roberts at third.

“Brayden is a natural athlete and a very instinctive player,” Chatham said. “He is a competitor and a steadying force in the middle infield for us.”

“Second base was a question mark coming into the season, but Collin has won the job. He is a super hard worker and gritty baseball player. He really improved his strength in the offseason and that has helped him in the field and at the plate. Ethan was our designated hitter last year, but is really solid defensively and we are very confident in him at third.”

Depth and rotation in the infield is another area where losing Conner West for the season really hurts. When not on the mound, West would have been a regular fifth infielder and would have seen time at shortstop, second and third, depending on who was pitching. His loss means Thornton’s role will be expanded this season.

Sophomore Phillip Herring will hold down first base on most days, but when he missed the opener at Oak Grove due to a previously scheduled competitive fishing tournament, Chatham gave Keaton Hollinghead a crash course in defending the bag and he performed admirably.

“Herring is a good young player,” Chatham said. “He has good size that helps at first, but is also very solid with his defensive skills.”

“Keaton was literally thrown



Photo by Russell Turner / Herald Editor

Coach Nick Chatham is shown going over pickoff moves to second base with several members of his pitching staff. The loss of the team’s top returning pitcher, Conner West, was a big blow just before the season got underway, but Chatham’s inexperienced and unheralded group has been impressive thus far.

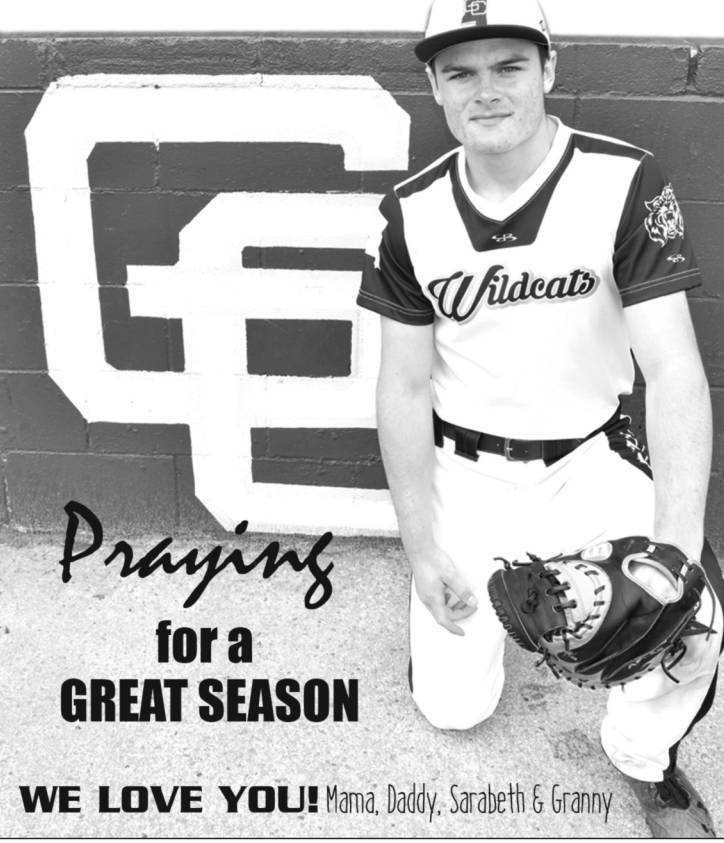
into the job on a moment’s notice and showed that he could adapt and play that role for us which is huge.”

Rounding out the defense will be junior catcher Jace Lott who is returning to his spot behind the plate. Chatham said he has a lot of confidence in Lott, not only as a defender, but as somewhat of a pitching coach during the games.

“Jace has really turned into a fine defensive catcher,” Chatham said. “He has a high baseball IQ, does a great job of blocking balls in the dirt and keeping runners in check. And, maybe most importantly this year, he does a great job of working with the pitchers, regardless of who is on the mound.”

“We are fortunate to have him behind the plate for us.”

LUKE BARFIELD



Praying
for a
GREAT SEASON

WE LOVE YOU! Mama, Daddy, Sarabeth & Granny

Good Luck

WILDCATS

From Our
TEAM
TO YOURS

we wish you the very best this season



Georgia-Pacific Leaf River Cellulose celebrating 36 years of partnership with the Pine Belt

Dawson “Nub” Thornton

Have a
GREAT
Season

We Love You!
Daddy, Ms. Tina,
Mason & Jaci

Good Luck

**WILDCATS
& LADY CATS!**

Cary E. Williams
Certified Public Accountant
416 St. Francis St. • Leakesville, MS • (601)394-5017