

High School Baseball Preview: Eagles' Devitt Making His Own Legend

The Klahowya ace comes from a talented family.

By Terry Mosher, For the Kitsap Sun
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The athletic bar has been set high for Rusty Devitt. Within his own family, no less. But the 6-foot-2 junior Klahowya pitcher is determined to meet the challenge.

Devitt, son of Darren and Sherril Devitt, watched as his older sister, [Brittany, a senior infielder with the Klahowya fastpitch team, acquired all-league honors and played to such a high level with the Washington Sidewinders Gold squad during the summer that in the fall she committed to Indiana University on a near full-ride athletic scholarship.](#)

"She's set the bar pretty high," the right-hander said, "but I'm going to go out and get it this year."

Some of the pressure of meeting that goal might have been eased if Joel Sheppard, a 6-6 pitcher who would have shared duties as the Eagles' mound ace with Devitt, had returned to the baseball diamond this spring. Sheppard's reportedly close to achieving his AA degree while holding down a 4.0 grade-point average and has decided to focus on his studies.

Sheppard and Devitt were both aces last summer for the American Legion Post 68 junior team that roared to a 44-4 record and a second-place finish in the state legion tournament.

"Joel's decision not to play puts a lot of weight on the shoulders of Rusty," says Tim Stabler, who coached the Post 68 team.

It is a weight that Devitt is ready to carry.

"I really want to do good this year," says Devitt. "I'm real determined."

During the off-season he picked up the pace of his workouts, lifting weights and going to Bodylink in Poulsbo to increase his power, quickness and agility. He also went to Big League Edge in Auburn, a baseball fitness organization founded by left-handed pitcher Jim Parque, who broke into the major leagues with the Chicago White Sox and this spring was a non-roster invitee with the Seattle Mariners (he was sent to the Mariners' minor-league camp last week).

Devitt attended Parque's camp when he was younger and returned in January and February to get ready for the challenges and the high



Larry Steagall, Kitsap Sun

Klahowya pitcher Rusty Devitt has become an imposing figure on the mound after bulking up to 205 pounds thanks to an offseason weight program.

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expectations that have been placed on him for the start of his junior season.

He worked with a left-handed pitcher within the Tampa Bay Devil Rays organization, a guy he only knew as Troy (a Troy Martin, a left-handed pitcher from Bellevue is listed within the Tampa Bay organization) on cleaning up his mechanics.

"He got me working on throwing harder, and helped me with my curveball a lot," says Devitt. "He taught me how to prepare for the season. It was a real cool experience."

Dave Neet is the new coach at Klahowya, but he's not new to baseball in the area. A Navy guy who will retire in June after 21 years of service, Neet has coached various select teams for years and knows baseball talent. He sees in Devitt a guy who could dominate.

"He's arguably one of the best pitchers in the area," says Neet, "just for the way he pitched last year for Post 68. He's one of the top junior pitchers in the state, from what I have seen. He has a fastball that not many teams will be able to keep up with."

Neet says that Devitt and junior center fielder Jordan Green could play at the next level. Green is the son of Rob Green, Neet's assistant coach. Green, senior catcher Chris Miller, Devitt and Isaac Solaita, senior outfielder and an outstanding football running back, all played for Stabler on the Post 68 team.

"Rusty has a lot of upside," says Stabler, a shipyard worker who has coached winning select baseball teams around West Sound for years. "He's just not a pitcher, either. He catches also. Rusty can play the infield. And he can hit the ball, too. He's a line-drive type guy who has some strength."

Devitt says he has put on 25-30 pounds since summer ball, most of it extra muscle due to his weight lifting regiment. He's now carries 205 pounds on his 6-foot-2 frame.

The extra weight and strength makes him an imposing figure on the mound, where his fastball will cross the plate in the mid-80s.

"He has an intimidating mound presence," says Neet. "It's hard to explain, but it goes just with the type of pitcher he is. He has an intense look, a stare down the barrel type."

Stabler said if there was a downside to Devitt it's that he liked to clown around more than what he liked.

"Sometimes he's kind of a free spirit," Stabler said. "He's a leader, but I just think sometimes he needs to take it a little more serious. You can do that clowning around when you are able and the time is right. But he's capable of being serious. When he wants to, he can be very serious.

"I know," Stabler added, "that he is one of my favorite kids to have on the team."

Neet plans on using Devitt all over the infield and behind the plate when he's not pitching.

"Rusty is our power," says Neet. "When he's not pitching, he'll be our utility guy, and play the corners and catch. He's a good hitter."

Meanwhile, in the background is a driving force that may push hard on Devitt this year.

"He doesn't like to live in the shadows of his sister," says Stabler, "so he needs to do good."