

New baseball coaches turn to mental acuity training

By Adam Crozier

As players listen, baseball coach **Jake Banwart**, hired for this year, lingers over fundamentals. He mentions defensive strategies for each position.

The point of these BLU63 meetings is to teach the mental game while the weather is poor. Once the weather becomes more representative of springtime, the coaching staff will be able to take the boys outdoors to practice America's pastime. Until then, the team hits at the batting cages in Extra Innings, an indoor sports facility that Banwart owns. Assistant coach **Jacob 'Wick' Wickliff** sits off to the front of the room, eyes glued to the presentation. Banwart continues to expose baseball's many mental aspects while the players watch in silence. "We don't just beat them," says Banwart. "We make them lose the next game."

The first game of the season will be played on March 12.

"As fun as it is stealing second base, third base is more fun," Banwart says. The bell rings and the thirty or so kids bolt out of the room.

"Next pitch mentality," Wick later said. "Whatever happens, you have to move forward from it. Control what you can control: attitude, effort, preparation."

Wick and Banwart took over coaching boys' baseball from PE teacher **John Carpenter** and Earth Science teacher **Chris Garrity**. Carpenter is

coaching in Center Grove.

Banwart worked in part with Kansas City Royals manager Ned Yost to develop an app.

"We have a distinguished focus on classroom sessions and mental training that reflects what the purpose of the app was and how to create players who understand the game," said Banwart.

Banwart said Baseball Academics trains players to achieve mental concentration and make advantageous strategic decisions during the heat of play. It's also customizable for preferred positions, Banwart said.

For example, someone might pick shortstop. Then, the app will ask them questions on realistic rundowns for that position. Depending on the quickness and accuracy of responses, players can increase their rank. Players can also compete against other people on the app by answering questions before anyone else in a large pool of people.

"Players get 30 second rounds to answer questions based on where to throw the ball if it was hit to them at the position of their choice," Banwart said.

"There are seven levels of progression and each level adds an additional variable that plays a role in the decision making process. (Ex: Level 1- 1 out, runner on 1st//Lever 5- 1 out, runner on 1st, Late innings, Tie Game, Slow Ball Speed.)"

At least, that was the intent. The

initial launch of Baseball Academics went well, but the programming, which was outsourced to India, began to show holes. Level One worked great, according to Banwart. But players would answer questions, choosing the right answer, and the game would register it as incorrect. On top of that, there is no real way to play the app. Instead, an HTML error displays.

"This is not a primary endeavor for me right now, and I am in a waiting process as it is the investors decision of when this will get fixed," Banwart said.

"There was a member of the team who originally did the programming that had experience, however, the depth of the app and the experience needed to program properly with over 120,000 situations was far greater than the experience he had."

The coaching duo believes there are certain skills that come from more than just an app, but can be helped by it. "There is no substitute for in-game experience, but you can learn everything from the mental side in the classroom IF the proper physical drills are implemented to create a focus on the approach, training from the classroom," Banwart said.

"Our goal is to teach the content and then implement the proper physical training to help the knowledge translate from the conscious mind to the subcon-



Dayton Jones

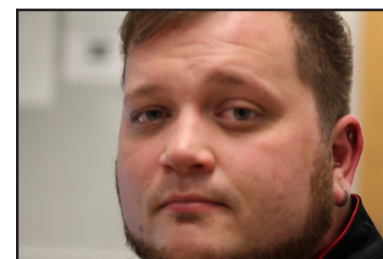
scious mind so players feel as if they are just 'reacting' because their brain is processing the information without them considering what is happening."

Junior **Dayton Jones** agrees: "Mental is so important because you have to know what to do in certain situations."

Although the app is defunct for now, the coaches still do their own data-heavy scouting. Because they both work at Extra Innings, they're able to compile data on teams and individuals for all over the area.

They look at on-base percentages, slugs, walkouts, ball contacts and formulate spray charts based on hits. But despite having a cache of data on hand, Perry needs to be ready for what it fails to anticipate.

"We have to walk in like it's ours to lose," Wick said. This means the players have to "project confidence."



Assistant Coach
Jacob Wick

The physicality of the game is something the coaches also have to instruct and instill in their players. "One of the hardest things to do in sports is hit a baseball," Wick said. "At this level, they have the skills, but their mentality can be their best friend or their worst nightmare."

Both Banwart and Wick are ready for the Falcons' season because they love baseball. "I'm very optimistic with it being a new program; a lot of energy, excitement that the kids are bringing," Wick said.

"There is going to be success for this 2018 season."

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Swimmers focus on success

By Sydney Mathis

Seniors used words like "warm," "comforting" and "open" to describe **Judi Treat**, their new head coach this season.

"She's definitely the type of coach who has cared about us as people and not just about how we were swimming," senior **Natalie Monroe** said.

Added senior **Sarah Jones**: "Treat pushed us and made us comfortable with her." Jones said another season highlight was bonding as a team and as friends.

As a result, these girls and other swimmers said they haven't lingered on losing at sectionals on Feb. 1 and 3. Instead, they will remember their strengths.

"A highlight from this season would be finishing all of our champion meets at the same or higher place than last year," Monroe said.

Treat, who is also a physical education teacher, emphasized effort above all. She pointed out repeatedly how hard each team member practiced and prepared.

The athletes swam every day of the week except on Sunday. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday they practiced in the morning and in the afternoon.

The coach praised junior **Taylor Jarboe** as one of the team's hardest workers, and that didn't change because she didn't make finals, she said.

The sectionals process is strenuous. The team competed in sectionals first on Feb. 1 in a variety of categories, vying for the top 16 spots (out of 32) in each. Those who place in the top eight go on to finals in that event. Those who place 9-16 swim in consolations, which are finals events consisting of swimmers who place in the second tier of swimmers during preliminaries.

Six swimmers made it to finals in the individual rounds on Feb. 3. Monroe participated in the 100 Fly, junior **Kyra Skeens** in the 200 Free, freshman **Emme Egan** in the 100 and 50 Fly.

In the consolations, Skeens participated in the 500 Free, Monroe in the IM (individual medley), Jones in the 50 and 100 Free, senior **Molly Brodzeller** in the 500 Free, and sophomore **Sophia**

Lopez-Wright in the 100 Back.

In the relays, Skeens, Monroe, Jones and Egan made it back to the 200 and 200 Free Finals. Junior **Tristin Grubb**, Lopez-Wright, junior **Quinnlyn Kunkel** and Brodzeller participated in the consolations of the 400 Free Relay.

The best meet of the year, said Treat, was definitely County, where many of the girls beat their personal records. "All the swimmers did a great job of buying into what needed to be done for this meet."

Monroe and Brodzeller agreed that life lessons have been part of swim team.

"Since I've been swimming since I was four, I have definitely benefited from my various teams and coaches," Brodzeller said. "We seniors definitely had to crack down on the underclassmen when it comes to respect, so I will definitely be taking my leadership skills with me when I graduate."

Monroe said, "Swimming has taught me that I should let things happen, and everything will work out in the end."