



Q & A, you say?
Assistant softball coach Stacy Pondo has come a long way since she dual majored in sports management and marketing at Mercyhurst in 1999. Read more about it on Page 4B.

Section B Sports

Mike Bello, Sports Editor

Pointing the way
The weather is getting warm, and the track and field team is ready for coach Dave Cooper, left, to lead it through a successful outdoor season. See Page 3B



Calendar of Events

Behrend Athletic Events

Friday

Women's Water Polo Behrend Tournament vs. Mercyhurst Junker Center 6 p.m.

Saturday

Men's Tennis Pitt-Greensburg Pennbriar Athletic Club 11 a.m.

Men's Baseball @ John Carroll w/ JV 1 p.m.

Women's Water Polo Behrend Tournament Junker Center Behrend vs. Gannon A 1 p.m.

Mercyhurst vs. Gannon B 2 p.m.

Behrend vs. University Park 4 p.m.

Gannon B vs. E. Michigan 5 p.m.

University Park vs. Gannon A 6 p.m.

Behrend vs. IUP 7 p.m.

Tuesday

Men's Baseball @ Hilbert 2 p.m.

Friday, March 22

Men's and Women's Track and Field @ Clarion Invitational 10 a.m.

Saturday, March 23

Men's and Women's Track and Field @ Clarion Invitational 9 a.m.

Men's Tennis Penn State Altoona Pennbriar Athletic Club 1 p.m.

Men's Baseball Penn State Altoona (DH) Behrend Baseball Field 1 p.m.

Women's Softball Penn State Altoona (DH) Behrend Softball Field 1 p.m.

Intramurals Schedule

Friday, March 22

Intramural Soccer: Men's, Women's, and Coed - \$3 - Teams are allowed any two combination of two varsity or ex-varsity, no restrictions on number of players

White Water Rafting in Chiopyle, PA - \$39 - Trip set for April 27, transportation will be provided

All entries must be at the intramural office by 4 p.m. on the scheduled date

* Subject to change Behrend Baseball Field, 2:30

Baseball springs to success in Florida

by Mike Bello sports editor

If spring training is a harbinger of things to come, then the Behrend baseball team's anticipation level must be through the roof. The Lions returned home from their spring break trip with a 6-3 record, including a ninth-inning loss, and geared up for the first game on their new field.

"(The field) has made a great change in our program. Our guys are having a blast," said coach Paul Benim. "It's going to be an asset once we get out there on a daily basis and [are] able to utilize it and get comfortable with it."

The Lions begin their season up north against John Carroll on Saturday. Behrend is scheduled to play its first home game on March 23 against Penn State Altoona at 1 p.m. That may change if Tuesday's away game against Hilbert gets switched to Erie for a 2:30 p.m. start, a strong possibility. The team, no matter where it plays, knows that any chance it can get to use the field will help down the road.

"I think we are more prepared this year than ever because of the new facilities," said catcher Luke Bundy. "The new facilities gave an opportunity this year to do so much more in practice."

Despite getting only one outdoor practice in before spring break, the Lions weren't the least bit rusty. Behrend won six of its first seven games at Fort Myers, Fla. before dropping its last two games to Beloit.

The Lions were more than happy to enjoy a week away from the Erie weather and a chance to catch some rays.

"I would say (the highlight of the trip was) just being outside playing baseball and the day we spent on Ft.

Myers beach," said Bundy.

Teammate Jason Karas agreed. "On the field (the highlight) was coming away from Florida with a 6-3 record. Off the field, (it) was going to Ft. Myers beach and seeing some bikinis."

Behrend's first loss, a 10-9 decision against Mt. Union on March 6, didn't lack in the suspense department. The Lions were down 7-1 after three innings, but rallied late in the game. Behrend scored three runs in the top of the ninth inning before making the third out.

Jake Boyle, the AMCC Player of the Week, had three hits and three RBIs, as did Tony Azzato, who also hit the team's first home run of the season. Craig Ottaviani, Karas, Chris Shearer, and Vinnie Canzano each added two hits. Karas and Canzano also scored two runs on an explosive day at the plate for Behrend.

In Behrend's opening game, Ryan Seyler gave up one run in five innings in a 5-1 win over Hiram, the first game of a doubleheader. Adam Best scored two runs, Keith Lepionka had two RBIs, and Boyle had two hits. Best also stole three bases in the game.

The Lions followed that up with a 5-4 win in the second game against Hiram (0-2). Ottaviani scored two runs and stole three bases in the leadoff position, while Mike Coutts knocked in two runs. Best added two of Behrend's seven hits. T.J. Aldrich,



PHOTO BY MIKE BELLO / BEHREND BEACON
Tyler Wiand throws to third baseman Tony Azzato during one of the few practices on the new baseball field. Azzato batted .407 and knocked in 10 runs in

Florida. not to be outdone, pitched five innings while giving up one run and striking out nine. Brian Pifer picked up the win, pitching the last two innings.

Two days later, on March 5, Behrend exploded for eight runs in the fifth inning to win 14-9 over Shenandoah (3-7). Boyle provided the punch on offense, going 3-for-6 with two runs scored and five RBIs. Karas, Best, Bundy, and Canzano all scored two runs. Best stole three more bases, bringing his three-game total to seven. Chris Kechisen pitched 4 1/3 innings for the win.

After nine games in seven days, the Lions learned a lot about the team's character.

"We learned we could win close games and come back late in the

game," said Karas. "Also, we can compete with any team that comes our way."

"We learned we can win a close ballgame when we need to and I think we gained confidence as a team that we can play with anyone," said Bundy.

The team's confidence grew after three more wins improved its record to 6-1, including a couple nail biters.

On March 7, the Lions gave up three runs in the bottom of the ninth to Emory & Henry (3-5) but hung on to win 12-7. Behrend, which hit .320 as a team during the trip, pounded out 13 hits, one more than Emory.

BASEBALL SPRING TRIP
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Mad about March (but not about May)

Why is it that the word "madness" is used to describe the NCAA basketball playoffs, but not the NBA playoffs? It's not because more people check into psychiatric wards in March than any other month, although I can understand if they do after listening to Dick Vitale for one game.

"It's awesome baby! Prime time! Nothing beats March Madness! It's crunch time."

Personal foul
Mike Bello sports editor

baby! Somebody get me off this speed before I burst!" Well, we can only hope on the last part.

Even if you are one of the many people who pays close attention to the Sweet 64 yet watches maybe two games total during the regular season, March Mania is still a great time in sports. It's exciting to predict who will knock off whom, and which team will be this year's Gonzaga.

That's what makes March Madness so interesting. It's unpredictable. The teams are so close that there are always shocking upsets during the playoffs. And the fact that this year, two of the top seeds didn't even win their division titles, makes it all the more exciting. It leaves everyone scratching their heads as to who will win.

It's also what makes March Madness that much better than the NBA.

If you think the NBA playoffs can compete with the NCAA ones, then you need a reality check. The NBA playoffs are about as exciting as curling or intramural floor sweeping. Sure, the NBA is a step up from the NCAA as far as talent level goes, but that is the area where the NBA falls flat.

Every year we have to watch the same teams win again and again. I'm so sick of Kobe Bryant, Shaq, and the Lakers. I also can't stand Mr. Iverson in Philly, who looks like a street thug with an attitude.

The championship series between the two teams last year wasn't worth watching one lick. You knew who was going to win anyway. In the same sense, who really wanted to watch the Bulls win all those championships? Not only did we know they'd win the title before the season started, we knew no other team would stand a chance.

Dominant teams ruin sports. What's worse, dominant teams and flashy players ruin the NBA.

The NBA is full of self-absorbed players like Kevin Garnett, Iverson, Bryant, O'Neal, Vince Carter, Latrell Sprewell, Jerry Stackhouse, and to a certain degree, Jordan. They love the spotlight and think they are the pride and joy of civilization. Their only gripe is we're not bowing down to worship them.

Of course, that's what happens when an education stops at eighth grade. Or when people "help" you get through high school and college. They don't know how to handle fame, money, and the whole glamour show we now call "professional" sports.

With college basketball, it's unlikely you'll find players high on themselves. It's because coaches don't take crap like that and the game is almost completely team oriented. The biggest reason you don't find self-absorbed players in college basketball? Those green papers with dead presidents on them hidden inside your wallet.

Without paid contracts, it's hard for college players to become self-absorbed. For the most part they do not run the show. If they want to be the center of attention, they can enter the draft. For now, they have to use the concept of teamwork to have a successful season.

NCAA'S SUPERIORITY
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This week's

senior athletic profile

Jason Karas: Relaxing on and off the diamond leads to success

by Kate Levdansky Petrikis assistant sports editor

Jason Karas, Behrend baseball player, started playing when he was 5-years-old. Karas has played infield since he started playing baseball, until this year when he made a change to the outfield. He now plays left field, and said his job is much easier.

"I just catch the ball and throw it to the cut-off man," said Karas. "There are no more bunt defenses and double plays, just simple baseball."

Karas, a graduate of Charters Valley High School in Bridgeville, Pa., said his coaches at Behrend have taught him to be a good person on and off the field.

"The ball does not always roll your way and sometimes you have to take the initiative to go and get it."

Karas juggles school and baseball but said he manages his time easily. He said all he has to do is get things done ahead of time, and not wait until the last minute. Practices for baseball early in the season were at night because of basketball. Now, they are typically held from 4 to 6 p.m. on the baseball field.

In his spare time, Karas lifts weights, hunts, fishes, and hangs out with friends.

Karas prepares for games by listening to relaxing music. "Baseball is a thinking game,

and I have the tendency to get extremely fired up to the point where I can not think," said Karas. "So, I listen to relaxing music to calm myself down. My game preparation would be much different if I was playing a different sport. For me, with playing baseball, having a clear and relaxed mind is the best."

Karas said his two strongest characteristics are his sense of humor and his ability to get along with anyone.

Karas' biggest influence in his life is his father.

"I am very close to him, and if it was not for him, I would [have] never played baseball," said Karas. "He makes me want to succeed in anything I do and is the best person I know."

He also said his role models are his family.

"They mean everything to me, and I look up to all of them," said Karas. "I have two older brothers who taught me some very valuable lessons through life."

Karas is majoring in marketing, but is not sure why he picked it as he nears graduation.

"I thought I knew why I picked that major, but my perspective on life changed," he said.

After graduation, Karas plans to go to graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh to get his masters in sports management. He hopes to become a college coach or become a high school athletic director.



PHOTO BY MIKE BELLO / BEHREND BEACON
Jason Karas is such an intense player on the field that he listens to music before the game to relax himself. It's worked so far, as coach Paul Benim praised Karas' abilities. "Jason Karas is a very, very dangerous hitter," said Benim. "He can hit with a wooden bat and not everyone can do that."