The Sharks of 2011

Ponte Vedra compiled an epic four year run from 2010-13 as the Sharks made it to the final four in three out of those four years.

However, I have often mentioned to friends, fans, and listeners on our web streaming that the most talented of these four clubs was the 2011 nine that never made it past the districts, let alone make it all the way to the coveted ‘final four.’

There can be little doubt that the state champs of 2013 had the deepest pitching staff in Shark annals, but in this ‘ole announcers’ opinion nobody topped the 2011 squad in position players outside the mound.

Counting a pair of pre-season victories, the Sharks playing their usual schedule against the best opponents they could find, posted an overall record of 19-10, but the sting of losing in the district semi-finals to Nease will not be soon forgotten by the 2011 alums.

Never one to dodge any opponent to fatten up one’s win-loss record, the Sharks kicked off their regular season campaign by posting an impressive 6-3 victory over an always tough Providence team. The victory wasn’t accomplished because Providence didn’t elect to use the ace of their staff to open the contest. Not at all! The Sharks would knock the Providence starting pitcher out of the box by scoring 4 runs in the first two innings of work, with Nathan Rokosz delivering the knock-out punch with a two rbi double in the second inning.

That Providence pitcher, Walter Lockett, would make it all the way to the major leagues seven years down the road as a pitcher for the San Diego Padres. Although Lockett was tagged with the loss against the Sharks, he came a triple short from hitting for the cycle with a 3-3 performance against Shark pitchers Elliott Warford and Graham Barfield. Picking up the save by pitching two scoreless innings in preserving the win was submarine tosser Erick Morris.

The Sharks would then win 4 of their next 5 contests, with one of those victories, a 6-5 win over Fletcher, atoning for the only loss during that span.

The Sharks then made the first of their annual trips to Valdosta to partake in the first of their Florida/Georgia border clashes. The Sharks disposed of a very good Pope High School team from the Atlanta area in winning a 13-7 slugfest. Sophomore Luke Parker led the way for the victors with a perfect 3-3, including two doubles, a pair of walks and four runs scored to pace PVHS.

Coach Stanton utilized his entire pitching staff in the Fri-Sat series before finally running out of arms after 10 innings were completed in a contest all knotted up at 5-5 against Valdosta Lowndes. Lefty Travis Byers, after pitching 3 scoreless innings, gave way to Nathan Rokos to begin the bottom of the 11th inning. Desperate to find anybody with a ‘live arm’ Rokos volunteered to take the mound for Coach Stanton. Two walks, a base hit and a game winning sacrifice fly spelled defeat for the pitching thin Sharks. It would be the first, and only appearance as a pitcher for Rokos in his outstanding three-year career on the Ponte Vedra varsity.

Among the 19 victories compiled by the Sharks in 2011 included wins against such perennial powers as Bartram Trail, Bishop Kenny, Creekside and Bolles. The win over Bartram Trail is one of only two wins for PV over the Bears in school history.

The 10-0 shutout of Bolles included a record-setting performance by Kevin Young. The future Florida Gulf Coast outfielder had a still standing record six runs batted in the victory that included a grand slam home run as well as a 2-run blast that sailed well over the Bolles left field fence. This wasn’t an average Bolles team but one that featured two future major leaguers, Austin Slater and BJ Stewart, an NFL star in Hayden Hurst who also played minor league baseball, and a future regular on an NCAA championship Florida team in Christian Hicks.

A highlight of the campaign had to include the Sharks making it to the finals of a big invitational tournament co-hosted by Mandarin and Atlantic Coast High School. The Sharks posted consecutive wins over Paxon, Bishop Kenny and Stanton Prep to earn a berth into the championship game against Rockledge.

The Sharks made it to the championship game despite not using their number one pitcher, future Furman star Elliot Warford, in the entire tournament. Instead of starting Warford against Rockledge, coach Stanton called on a young sophomore to start against Rockledge. Although he was knocked around for six runs against the visitors from the south, Walker Sheller would go on to have an illustrious career in this great game of baseball that has him just a notch below pitching in the major leagues.

Here is a thumbnail sketch of this 2011 squad:

Catcher: Chris Tiefer. Tiefer established a Shark record that will probably not soon be broken. He gunned down an unheard of 17 opponents foolishly attempting to steal a base against his rifle arm. Tiefer knocked in 17 runs while hitting a respectable .275. Tiefer was ably backed up by a young freshman, Alex Willich, who would be the starting catcher for PVHS the next 3 years.

First Base: Nathan Rokosz. Although Nathan was an outstanding infielder at both shortstop and third, Rokosz was called upon shortly into the 2011 season to fill in at first base. Although playing first base for only about 2/3 of the season, he made my all-time PVHS baseball team at this position. Recruited to play at the next level by such schools as Indiana, Rokosz elected to become a student only at FSU.

Second base: Bret Poling. A 4-year regular for PV, 2011 would be the only year he wasn’t a starter at 3rd base. Poling, who would play college baseball for FSCJ, would hit out of the 9-hole for most of his 4 years and would bat .306 over the course of the season.

Third base: Luke Parker. Only a sophomore in 2011, Parker would have his most productive year for the Sharks where he hit .281 with 10 stolen bases. Parker would transfer from PV the following season where he finished his career at Providence. You might remember Luke as a reality star on the IV show The Batchelor.

Short Stop: Kenny Byram. Kenny would have a brilliant career for the Sharks including capping his career by hitting safely in his last 16 games. Byram committed only 2 errors in his final 15 games as a Shark while stealing 15 bases. Byram would then go on to have a stellar career as a 4-year regular at Sacred Heart, even leading his university into the NCAA tournament in his freshman season of 2012.

There could be little doubt that the outfield of 2011 was the finest in PVHS history.

Left Field: Brett Mueller. Brett, who also saw extended action as a pitcher for the Sharks, hit a solid .349 with a career high seven triples as a PV regular. Mueller would then become a starting pitcher for Rollins College.

Center Field: Jake Jacob. Jake sits atop the all-time leader board in a number of categories during his illustrious Shark career. Although listed as falling just one hit short in career hits to Max Miller, with no statistics available in his 9th grade season in 2009, it is likely that Jacob stands alone in that department. Even with the 2009 stats still hiding in oblivion somewhere, Jacob still crossed the plate (83) times, more than any other player who donned a Shark uniform. Jacob stole a career tops 65 bases, a mark that hasn’t come close to being eclipsed. After starting as a freshman at nearby Flagler College, the speedy Jacob had his career cut short with a back injury.

Right Field: Kevin Young. In two years as the starting right fielder for PV, Young posted a career batting average of .381 with 42 rbi. As stated above, his 6 rbi vs. Bolles has still remained unsurpassed in Shark history. Young would then become a starter at FGCU. His younger brother wouldn’t turn into a ‘bad’ player also. Jacob Young is the current starting center in MLB for the Washington Nationals where he is featured often on ESPN for top ten plays.

Pitching Staff:

Clearly the leader of this staff was Elliott Warford. Warford was a perfect 6-0 on the season, just one year after putting the Sharks on his back and leading the locals into their first final four in 2010. Warford would become the ace of the pitching staff at Furman.

Others: Matt Deegan. Matt won 4 games against 3 defeats in his sophomore season. Deegan would end his PVHS career atop the leader board in most of the pitching categories.

Nate Allen: A strike machine with pinpoint control, Nate was a valuable innings eater for the Sharks.

Brett Mueller: Primarily an outfielder, Brett picked up a pair of victories in the season.

Jared Brehm: Appeared in 10 games for the Sharks and is currently on the PVHS staff with Warford.

Erik Morris: Figured in 4 decisions, including a win and a team high two saves.

The season came to a bitter close for the locals with their season ending loss to rival Nease in the semi-final game of the districts. It may be hard to comprehend today, but back in 2011 there were a massive 9 teams comprising this imposing district.

A team had to win at least two games just to insure themselves of advancing into the district finals and a berth into the regional playoffs. Coach Stanton had a terrible decision to ponder: When to utilize his ace Warford? Knowing that if you lose the first game you are eliminated from the tournament, Stanton called upon his ace Warford to face Palatka in the opening round.

Warford, as always, rose to the occasion and shut out a good Palatka team 4-0.

Warford would have had to be near perfect in the Shark’s semi-final game vs. Nease. The Panther’s Spencer Brown, who would never be accused of breaking the speed dial on a radar gun, totally befuddled the exasperated Sharks by limiting PV to but a single run as Nease upset the Sharks 3-1. Twice the Sharks had a couple of golden opportunities to break the game open, but they left the bases loaded in both the 4th and 5th inning.

With the presence of heavy smoke encompassing the area, even forcing the closing of Phillips Highway, a downtrodden band of Sharks had to find a smoke free route to return home. Although the Shark season had come to a sudden end, this loyal Shark fan will not soon forget this talented group.

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