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## High school baseball: Top 20 players

# Work ethic elevates Brother Rice's Conway

Tom Markowski / The Detroit News

**BIRMINGHAM** -- Like many talented young players, Matt Conway found it easy to play sports. Whether it was basketball, baseball or football, Conway fit right in. He was good at everything.

But unlike most young players, Conway wasn't satisfied with just being good. As a sophomore last season at Birmingham Brother Rice, Conway noticed how hard shortstop DJ LeMahieu worked at his game. LeMahieu, now the starting shortstop at Louisiana State, was one of the best players in the state last season, and it wasn't because he was the most talented. LeMahieu made himself the best by coming to practice early, leaving practice late and practicing on his own.

"Early on you could see everything came easy for him," Brother Rice coach Bob Riker said of Conway. "Then he looked at DJ and saw how hard he worked. He's a different player now."

As a sophomore last season, Conway emerged as the No. 1 starter for Riker. This season, at 6-foot-7 and 230 pounds, Conway, a left-hander on the mound and at the plate, is The Detroit News' No. 1 player in Metro Detroit.

Conway plays first base and the outfield, and it's uncertain whether he'll pitch or play first in college. The decision on where to go to college has already been made. Conway committed to Wake Forest.

Conway said Wake Forest recruited him as a pitcher and as a first baseman.

"Now I can relax and help my team win," Conway said of his early commitment. "I can

work on parts of my game I need to get better at. I need to improve my velocity and improve my footwork at first. Plus, I want to hit the ball farther."

At 83 mph, the velocity on his fastball is more than adequate at this level. Last season, Conway was 9-2 in 16 starts with a 1.68 ERA. He struck out 86 in 79 innings and walked 34. At the plate, Conway hit .340 with 33 RBI, 28 runs, nine doubles and 19 walks.

"He's still a puppy," Riker said. "His hitting has really improved over last season."

Conway said doctors told him he won't get any taller, but he still has some growing to do.

"It's time for me to get heavier," he said. "If I get bigger and stronger it'll help my game. I don't want to get too big up top. I'm trying to eat as much protein as I can."

Here are the rest of The News' top 20, listed alphabetically:

**SS Jon Berti, Troy, 5-10, 170, senior:** A four-year starter, Berti batted .400 as a sophomore and junior. "He's got good speed and is a good fielder, too," coach Frank DeVito said. Berti bats leadoff and he signed with Bowling Green.

**OF Patrick Biondi, Dearborn Divine Child, 5-9, 160, junior:** Biondi has started every game and has batted leadoff since the first game of his freshman season. Last season he hit .367 with 31 runs, nine doubles, 13 triples and 19 RBI. He stole 14 bases in 15 attempts and had five assists. Michigan and Kentucky have offered Biondi a scholarship.

**RHP/IF/CF Josh Deeg, Lake Orion, 5-10, 165, senior:** Last season Deeg was the top pitcher on the Division 1 state championship team. He was 9-0 with a 1.92 ERA. In 66 innings he struck out 74 and walked 33. As the leadoff hitter Deeg batted .357 with 34 runs and 21 RBI.

**SS/RHP Daniel Fields, U-D Jesuit, 6-3, 195, junior:** Fields started as a freshman when the Cubs reached the Division 1 final. Last season he batted .425. "His work ethic is tremendous," coach Al Fernandez said. "He's very humble. He runs well, hits the long ball and has good range at short."

**CF/LHP Curtis Fisher, Grosse Pointe Woods Liggett, 5-11, 180, senior:** A four-year starter, Fisher batted over .500 his first three seasons. Last year he hit .578 with five home runs, 46 RBI, 28 runs and 43 stolen bases. Fisher was 6-2 on the mound with a 1.98 ERA. He signed with Michigan State.

**IF/RHP Mat LaMothe, Troy Athens, 6-1, 170, senior:** One of the top pitchers in Oakland County last season, LaMothe was 7-3 with a 2.50 ERA. He struck out 106. At the plate he hit .525. His fastball is consistently in the mid-80s, topping out at 87 mph. He signed with Oakland University.

**SS/C Andy Lentz, Birmingham Brother Rice, 6-0, 180, senior:** A three-year varsity player, Lentz batted .409 (45-for-110) last season with 36 runs, 37 RBI, 11 doubles and

three triples. He stole 15 bases, had 17 walks and struck out 15 times. He signed with Georgetown.

**OF John Martinez, Warren DeLaSalle, 5-9, 178, junior:** A three-year starter, Martinez batted .365 last season. "John is a free swinger and showed consistency at the plate," coach Brian Kelly said. "I've never had a better centerfielder."

**2B/CF C.J. Maszal, Allen Park, 5-11, 185, senior:** Maszal suffered a shoulder injury last season that curtailed his performance. He batted .400 as a sophomore and coach Glenn Gulliver said Maszal is 100 percent and ready to have a big season.

**OF/RHP Connor Mielock, Lake Orion, 6-3, 170, senior:** Mielock is equally effective on the mound and at the plate. Last season he was 8-2 with a 2.41 ERA. In 52 innings he had 50 strikeouts and he walked 18. He batted .376 with 29 RBI and 34 runs.

**OF/LHP J.D. Osborn, Rochester Adams, 6-4, 180, senior:** Osborn was 1-2 last season with a 2.54 ERA, mostly in relief. In 30 innings he struck out 20. His fastball is consistently in the low 80s, topping out at 85 mph. He signed with Wofford (S.C.).

**SS/RHP Drew Pyles, West Bloomfield, 5-9, 165, senior:** A four-year varsity player, Pyles was 10-2 last season with a 1.98 ERA. He also batted .426. Pyles pitched in a number of big games last season and was the winning pitcher in the districts and regionals. Pyles has a 4.0 grade-point average.

**C Mike Romanchik, Macomb Dakota, 6-2, 188, junior:** He was named first-team All-MAC after batting .350 and throwing out 17 base runners. Romanchik also was the backup quarterback on the Division 1 championship football team.

**OF/LHP Ricky Samuel, White Lake Lakeland, 6-3, 195, junior:** Samuel batted .417 with 15 doubles, four home runs and scored 37 runs as a sophomore. He was 3-2 on the mound with one save and a 2.88 ERA. His fastball tops out at 88 mph. In 43 2/3 innings he struck out 42 and walked 26.

**1B/3B/RHP Tyler Scott, Novi, 6-6, 195, senior:** A lanky right-hander, Scott was 5-2 last season. In 54 innings he struck out 53 and walked 35. Coach John Kostrewa said Scott throws hard (86 mph) but needs to improve his control. Scott signed with Toledo.

**OF/LHP Damarrii Saunderson, Northville, 6-3, 192, senior:** A three-year starter, Saunderson signed with Iowa Wesleyan. Big and strong, Saunderson is a terrific athlete. He batted .310 last season, then really improved during summer baseball.

**IF/OF/RHP Kyle Teague, Oxford, 6-1, 165, senior:** Teague throws in the mid- to upper-80s and is one of Oxford's top batters. Last season Teague was 9-3 with a 0.98 ERA. In 71 innings he struck out 109 and walked 11. Teague hit .464 and signed with Oakland University.

**3B/OF/RHP Tim Tibaudo, Grosse Pointe North, 6-0, 180, senior:** Tibaudo was 8-2 last

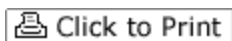
season with a 1.76 ERA. He has a sharp breaking ball that makes his 83-mph fastball appear even faster. A left-handed hitter, Tibaudo batted .379.

**OF/RHP Kevin VanGheluwe, St. Clair Shores Lake Shore, 6-3, 208, senior:**

VanGheluwe excels in the field and on the mound. Last season he was 11-2 with a 0.79 ERA. In 70 2/3 innings he struck out 88 and walked 15. At the plate he batted .454 with 10 home runs and 55 RBI. He signed with Michigan.

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