

DAILY Southtown SPORTS

BASEBALL

‘When he’s on the mound, we’ll compete with anyone in the state.’

—Richards coach **Brian Wujcik** on junior left-hander **Angelo Smith**

Michigan recruit Smith anchors deep pitching staff for Richards

BY PAT DISABATO | Daily Southtown

Richards coach Brian Wujcik has high hopes for the season. As well he should. Richards returns six starters from a 19-15 team, led by seniors Chris Zeschke (Lewis recruit), Kyle Renken (Benedictine), Nick Mejia (Dominican) and Nick Fritz.

However, having a pitcher the caliber of junior Angelo Smith every five days is what really excites Wujcik. A Michigan recruit, Smith boasts a dazzling repertoire. It's not so much that Smith, a left-hander, is overpowering. His fastball primarily hits the mid-80s, but it has great movement. His off-speed arsenal, which includes a curveball and change-up, is wicked.

“Angelo is our best pitcher since Brian Smith in 2004,” Wujcik said. “When he’s on the mound, we’ll compete with anyone in the state.”

The Bulldogs (2-0) will not suffer a major letdown when Smith isn’t on the mound. Renken and Zeschke are a solid Nos. 2 and 3 in the rotation. Brenden Butler and Mejia will provide additional depth.

“I like our staff,” Wujcik said. “We have

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Richards junior left-hander Angelo Smith, a Michigan recruit, has the ability to shut down the best teams in the state.

GARY MIDDENDORF/DAILY SOUTHTOWN



BLACKHAWKS

Players dismiss fatigue excuse

Hawks insist recent poor play not linked to past playoff runs

BY CHRIS HINE
Chicago Tribune

Like other players in the Blackhawks’ core, defenseman Niklas Hjalmarsson has played a mind-boggling amount of hockey this decade.

Making deep playoff runs can make the numbers add up.

So it’s understandable if Hjalmarsson and his teammates are fatigued as they near the end of another 82-game regular season.

But Hjalmarsson and other Hawks said fatigue is not a valid reason for how poorly the Hawks have played in March, when they have lost 7 of the 10 games they have played, including four of five at home.

“I personally feel all right,” Hjalmarsson said Wednesday. “But it doesn’t really matter if you’re tired mentally or physically, you could still compete hard every night. ...

“It’s a little embarrassing the way we’ve played here especially at home in front of our crowd.”

What was interesting in light of that “embarrassing” 6-2 loss Tuesday was that those players who spoke after the game did not deny the Hawks were fatigued. Like Hjalmarsson, they said fatigue, whether it’s mental or physical, can’t be the culprit for the Hawks’ struggles.

“You can come up with a laundry list of excuses,” captain Jonathan Toews said. “So at the end of the day, we’re not going to point fingers at any exact thing that could be the culprit. ... We have to work through it and that’s what we’re going to do.”

Added winger Patrick Kane: “I don’t think we can use that as an excuse right now. We have a lot of different guys in here. ... Everyone should be fired up and ready to play and wanting to do what we did last year again.”

Coach Joel Quenneville and the Hawks had an atypical Wednesday, for a day after a game. Typically, the Hawks are off the day after games and have no media availability. But Quenneville brought the team in for off-ice workouts and held a video session to go over what needs to improve before they embark on a four-game road trip through Calgary, Vancouver, Minnesota and Winnipeg.

“By bringing us here and showing us on video, it definitely brings to light ... what areas that we have to get better,” winger Andrew Desjardins said. “A lot of it’s just puck battles, being on the right side of pucks. I think it comes down to not as much systems (problems), but individual puck battles, one-on-one battles. The puck’s going through us too easy.”

The Hawks have a three-day break to regroup – their longest break in the schedule the rest of the season. And they look like they can use the rest.

chine@tribpub.com
Twitter @ChristopherHine



NUCCIO DINUZZO/CHICAGO TRIBUNE
Blackhawks center Jonathan Toews battles the Stars’ Vernon Fiddler for possession of the puck Tuesday at the United Center.

WHITE SOX

Ventura: Quintana among most underrated

Sox pitcher looking for his first 10-win season

BY COLLEEN KANE
Chicago Tribune

GLENDALE, Ariz. — When White Sox manager Robin Ventura considers underrated players throughout baseball, he puts left-hander Jose Quintana near the top of the list.

“I would put him in the top

five,” Ventura said. “He’s underrated — not by me or anybody in that clubhouse, but outside just because of the record. ... He’s very reliable and highly respected inside the clubhouse, not only for how he pitches but how he has carried himself as well.”

After presiding over a tough few seasons with the Sox and a camp marred by a player-management dispute over Adam LaRoche’s retirement, Ventura

seemed happy to point to Quintana as a player he doesn’t much have to worry about this spring.

Along with a touted work ethic and consistency over his last three seasons, Quintana has a temperament that has helped him to remain calm despite spotty help from the Sox offense.

He recorded at least 200 innings and an ERA lower than 3.55 each of the last three seasons but didn’t record more than nine victories in any one

year, the first pitcher since 1901 to have that distinction.

His 25 quality starts were the second-most in the American League last season behind Dallas Keuchel, and his 3.62 run support average was the second-lowest in the AL.

The Sox hope they have fixed their offensive problems enough this offseason that Quintana might be able to top the nine-

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