

JUNIOR COLLEGE BASEBALL

LMC baseball prepared for league play

Red Hawks hope to improve defense as season progresses

By **AUSTIN BORNHEIM**
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The Lake Michigan College baseball team is back from annual its swing through Georgia and Tennessee.

And while the Red Hawks struggled during their trip south - posting a 1-5 record before returning to Michigan - coach Scott Ponegalek thinks the experience

prepared his team as Michigan Community College Athletic Association conference play begins.

"It was like spring training for our guys," said Ponegalek, whose team is currently 1-11 after dropping its conference opener Wednesday. "They battled hard, I think we learned a lot and the guys got some good innings."

It was especially helpful for the team's 15 freshmen, plenty of who are getting playing time.

Freshman Charlie Fleenor of St. Joseph is starting in center field, Devin Williams of Coloma is starting at shortstop, and fellow freshmen Ed Heyboer and Zach

Oshinsky have seen time in the field and on the mound.

"There has been a bit of a (learning) curve for the younger guys," Ponegalek said. "But from this fall to now they have a come a long way."

Fleenor is batting second for the Red Hawks and part of their small-ball offensive approach.

Sophomore Nick Schultz, from Lakeshore, is playing second and batting third. Ponegalek said Schultz adds a big bat to an otherwise small lineup.

"We are a very athletic, have good team speed," Ponegalek said. "We run a lot of hit-and-runs,

steal, bunting guys over. But, Schultz is the guy in the middle that is will be tough to get out."

Williams is batting fifth where his athletic ability puts pressure on the opposing defense.

"When he gets on base things tend to go well," Ponegalek said.

While the Red Hawks' offense has started the season well, the team's defense and pitching has let it down.

Sophomore Brady Wasko of Bridgman heads the team's staff. But with little experience behind Wasko, the team has struggled - giving up an average of 10.5 runs a game.

"I thought coming into the season pitching and defense would be our strength, but that hasn't been the case so far," Ponegalek said.

Ponegalek has seen improvement on the mound from Elliot Lemon, a Lakeshore graduate, over the recent weeks.

"He has had a slow start, but he has turned a corner," he said. "His last couple of outings have been better and he will be there for us as the season goes on."

The Red Hawks will play their home opener against Macomb Community College on April 4.

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