

Chicagoland Classic Showcase fills baseball players' needs for games

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Adrian Perez can't get enough baseball. The Leyden outfielder would play year-round if he could.

For now, he's just making sure he's playing all summer.

In August, months after the high school season is over and days after his Downers Grove Longshots concluded their summer travel season, the rising senior from West Leyden plays in a house league with friends in River Grove. That adds another five to 10 baseball games just when other high school athletes are preparing for the first day of football practice Aug. 10.

But Perez doesn't play any other sport and keeps his focus on baseball.

"I love the game," Perez said. "I don't want to step off the field."

He took advantage over the weekend of the opportunity to step onto Granderson Field at Illinois-Chicago. As one of the top returning players in the West Suburban for next season, Perez played in the newly named Chicagoland Classic Showcase Friday, June 19, and Saturday, June 20.

Last summer the event was conducted at St. Charles North, but moved to UIC's renovated venue for the first time. The showcase draws top players of the Class of 2016 from the Chicago area's eight largest high school conferences.

All games are nine innings, with just four batters each inning, so major-league scouts and college recruiters can see a variety of players and pitchers.

Perez was one of three Leyden Eagles named to the team, which included players from 12 of the 14 teams in the WSC. Players are nominated by their coaches following the high school season.

Hinsdale South led all West Suburban teams with six representatives, including pitcher Frank Basic, infielders Terrence Cribbs, Zack Duffy, Tim Dziergas and Aaron Frueh and outfielder Mike Nicosia.

Hinsdale Central was set to send outfielder Andrew Jurack and infielder Jake Ryder.

Perez played with Leyden teammates Jeremy Borges, a third baseman, and right-handed pitcher Michael Wilms. Wilms pitched the eighth inning of a 1-0 loss to the Central Suburban League Friday, allowing only one hit.

"I love baseball and I loved being out here," Perez said after Friday's game. "After playing for the Longshots, I can play here with even more of my friends."

Perez entered Friday's game in the seventh inning and went 0 for 2. Borges (0 for 2) assisted on a putout at first base after entering midway through the game. The West Suburban was scheduled to play the Upstate Eight Saturday.

The Chicagoland Classic weekend is among the many summer events that keeps the top returning players in the West Suburban busy. Most of the players on the 24-player roster have commitments to travel teams, while others compete for their high school.

Lyons infielder Jon Miranda is preparing for his final season with the Lions. On Friday, he hit the WSC's only extra-base hit, a seventh-inning double down the first-base line.

"I am only playing summer ball [with Lyons]," Miranda said. "I plan on being a leader as a senior, so I have to step up and show the juniors what's going on. I will go to a few exposure travel games [this summer]. It's good to get your name out there."

Oak Park-River Forest junior Andrew Hennings, fresh off an appearance at the Class 4A state finals with the Huskies' third-place team, will spend the rest of his summer with the Northbrook-based Devil Dogs. That team is scheduled to compete in tournaments in Minnesota, Indiana and Wisconsin.

The Huskies' shortstop was the only member of the West Suburban team to make three plate appearances on Friday and went 1 for 3 with a single.

"It's fun to play with different kids [in travel] instead of kids coming from the same team," Hennings said.

His OPRF teammate Hank Christie gave up the game's only run after allowing a hit and a walk in the second inning.

Hinsdale South second baseman Cribbs flashed his glove at Friday's showcase game. He turned in one of the top fielding performances when he made a diving stop to his left and threw out a CSL runner at first base.

He is in his fourth summer with the Darien Hitmen and plans on entering additional tournaments this summer at Notre Dame and at Butler.

"It's a lot of fun. You can't get too much baseball," Cribbs said.

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