

Poly Prep-ARATION

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Ryan Burke

Poly Prep pitcher Ryan Burke has baseball down to a simple formula: Preparation = Success.

Although Burke is headed to play for Wake Forest this fall, he doesn't allow himself to get comfortable or relax his training habits.

Since his junior year at Poly Prep, Burke has traveled from his Upper East Side residence to Deer Park, L.I., to work on his pitching.

There, Burke's mechanics are broken down by Rob Steinert, a former minor leaguer who has been training some of the nation's elite pitching recruits for the past nine years.

Burke has made a habit of visiting Steinert at least once or twice a week. In fact, the 6-2 southpaw's eyes light up when describing their weekly practices.

"He has this one tunnel with no catcher, where you just go and throw," Burke said of Steinert's facility. "He then breaks down the lower half of your body, the upper half and just tries to tweak your movements, so you get as much pop on your pitches as possible. It's helped a lot."

Burke went 4-2 last year with a 2.83 ERA, but the speed and power he added in the offseason impressed Wake Forest enough that they offered him a partial scholarship. He signed his letter of intent with the ACC school last November.

"It's very enjoyable for me to see Ryan move on to the next level," said Steinert, who also trains Stanford-bound Jack McGearry from Roxbury Latin in Massachusetts, considered the top lefthanded recruit in the country. "The first day he came in, what I liked about him was I could look in his eyes and see the passion there. He came in with a purpose and was willing to do whatever he had to. He's still like that."

Burke's practice habits have rubbed off on other members of Poly Prep's pitching staff as well. Blue Devils juniors Kevin Heller and Sam Hasty also visit Steinert. Heller has been seeing Steinert for nearly a year; Hasty began last October.

Steinert breaks down their games weekly and likes what he has seen.

"Kevin is explosive and very intense," Steinert said. "He has improved just as much, if not more than Ryan. He's a Porsche. Sam is a 6-7 guy who grew too fast. His body hasn't caught up. He's a long-term guy who's already showing flashes. He's a tractor trailer."

The Blue Devils, who play in the Ivy Prep Independent League, went 13-5 last season and earned the top seed in the New York State tournament, only to be upset in the semifinals.

Two weeks into the season, Poly Prep is 5-0-1 in non-league play and its coach, Matt Roventini, likes the blend of experience and youth, which includes second baseman/shortstop J.J. Franco - the son of former Met John Franco.

"We have a good mix of guys here," said Roventini, who's in his third year as Blue Devils coach. "We're a small school, so we want to go out there and show the rest of the borough that we're a pretty good team too."