

Conditioning plan key for St. Charles North's standout southpaw

By JAY SCHWAB - jschwab@kcchronicle.com

St. Charles North left-handed pitcher Phil Warner was the surprise of the North Stars' staff last year after beginning his junior season shuffled toward the back of a deep, talented rotation.

Warner started the season 5-0 and with a 1.42 ERA, numbers striking enough to grab coach Todd Genke's attention – and merit Warner an increased workload.

Warner maintained an ERA in the 1s throughout the season, but nonetheless entered the offseason determined to be a different pitcher as a senior. More specifically, a pitcher conditioned to last deeper into games, and perform better at the end of the season.

The burly, 6-foot-5 lefty was challenged by North coaches to focus on his conditioning during the offseason. Two months before his senior season begins, Warner thinks he's on the right track, but said he won't know for sure until games begin.

"I'm sure we're going to find out early on in the season whether I've done enough work to be where I need to be," Warner said. "I still have a couple months where I need to really grind it out and make sure I'm ready to go."

A more durable Warner would be key for North. Whereas Warner's strong performance last season was something of a luxury, with last year's co-aces Ryan Hudspeth and Jared Shurtleff lost to graduation, there are voids to fill atop North's rotation.

"I really hope that we can have more than one guy step up to be a team ace," Warner said. "I know me and [John Munyon] have tried to make it a goal of ours to be the two top guys in the rotation. We have experience, so we want to try and lead the team. ... But whatever the coaches think the team needs, I want to be able to do that."

Given his sharp pitching repertoire, it might be Warner's offseason conditioning that determines whether Warner can meet his goals, which includes playing Division I college baseball. Warner said he is running, biking and working on his diet in hopes of taking the mound in better shape this spring.

"There are some things you can change and some things you can't," Warner said. "I'm going to work on it, but being big also has its advantages as well. I'm going to try and lean down a little, but just so I can get the best of both [worlds]."

Warner is working out with his travel team, the Downers Grove Longshots, where he is a teammate of St. Charles East ace Wes Benjamin. Warner said his arm feels much better after some worrisome discomfort in the fall.

"I eventually started getting a little worried," Warner said. "It never really went away. I wasn't sure what was happening. I went and saw a doctor and got an MRI just to make sure everything was all right, but they said everything was fine – it was just a little inflamed from all the use and stuff."

Now that some rest has his arm feeling better, Warner is eager to build toward a big senior season. As a 6-5 lefty, Warner knows some refining could lead to a bright future.

"You can't just expect colleges to like you – you have to do the work to show them you really belong in their program," Warner said. "I'm still trying to work hard to show them I belong there."

- Jay Schwab is sports editor of the Kane County Chronicle.