

# DCA taking baby steps to build baseball program

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The first inning of Danville Christian's baseball history is playing out exactly as you might think, but at least the Warriors are finally in the game.

DCA's second attempt to start a baseball program has begun on a softball field at the local park, where the home team is taking the first halting steps toward viability and taking its lumps every time it takes the field.

It's a long way from where school officials hope the program will be just a few years from now, but it's exactly where they want it to be today.

Athletic director David Lamb said the time was right to revive a program that played only a single season about a decade ago, not because the school has players who can compete but because it has players who are willing to play and to help the team get off the ground.

"You've got to start somewhere, and it's all been exactly like I expected it to be," Lamb said. "If we don't start now, when do we start? Do we wait until we have nine players that can play? That's never going to happen if we don't start building."

It is part of a larger building project within DCA athletics, which has added a handful of new teams this school year in another indication of the growth of the school that junior Nick Holderman said allows students to participate in a sport they love in a Christian environment.

"I think DCA is growing substantially, even in the past two years, and we haven't really had a baseball team and I feel like that's a major sport," Holderman said.

Holderman last played baseball when he was in the fifth grade, and while some of his teammates have a similar level of experience, others have never played the game at all.

"Our catcher was catching, and right in the middle of the game he asked me what a strike zone was. And then I was asked by one of our starters, 'How do you score a point?'" said Lamb, who frequently pitches in as an assistant coach. "We're not talking about kids that are around baseball, we're talking about kids that had never watched a game."

"So there's no metric to where this team is not a success. They're learning and they're growing."

Not surprisingly, however, they are not winning. DCA will take an 0-8 record into a doubleheader Saturday at Burgin.

The Warriors struggle to score runs, struggle to get opposing hitters out, sometimes struggle to make simple plays and likely will not win this season as they play a limited schedule. Yet Lamb said they are miles ahead of where they were at the start of the season.

"I know it's not going to look like this to some people, but I think we look like a baseball team," he said. "They're catching grounders, they're throwing people out, they're catching fly balls, they're standing in the batter's box and not bailing out. They're looking like baseball players."

That is due in no small part to the work of head coach C.J. Michel, who



Center fielder Judah Lamb of Danville Christian reaches to catch a fly ball during an April 28 game against Berea at Millennium Park. (Photo by Mike Marsee)

has one son on the high school team and another on the middle school team that he also leads.

"I just enjoy teaching kids positive things and giving them a chance to learn something new and make memories at school," Michel said. "These kids who are here for our first year, I'll never forget them. I told them their picture is going to be on my wall forever."

Michel, who also was the coach during DCA's first attempt to launch a baseball program, has 12 players on the high school roster, and he said he has seen considerable growth in their short time as a team.

Lamb, who has two sons on the team, said there are players who came out for the team - including his oldest, senior Josiah Lamb - not because they expected to become good baseball players but because they wanted to be part of this new team.

"We're building something ... and they're just having fun and enjoying each other and the fellowship."

Holderman also said the players simply enjoy being around each other.

"They want to be around their friends and they want to help out and build a program," he said.

Opposing coaches have helped with the construction as well. Lamb said he reaches out to them before they play DCA for the first time to be clear about the state of the program, and he said all of them have been understanding and several have even taken time during games to give pointers to the Warriors.

"I want to give them an opportunity to be gracious," he said. Nobody's just trying to destroy us. Every single team we've played has been like that"

Holderman said he sees a time when DCA can be as competitive in baseball as it currently is in basketball.

"Our basketball program started just like this ... so I think if we look at it like that, in maybe five years we're competing with some of the best teams in this area," he said.

Lamb said he would like to see the team become competitive in the 45th District and the 12th Region within five years, and he said the school has begun to talk about building its own ballpark. (The team plays its home games at Millennium Park.)

As for the present, Holderman said the measure of whether this season is a success will be simple.

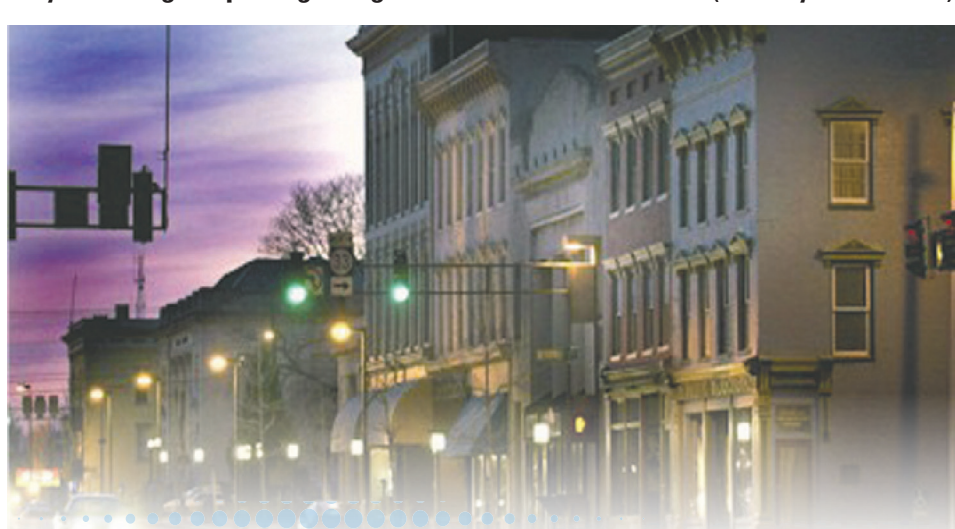
"I think just getting better," he said. "I mean, our first win would be very nice, but just enjoying the rest of the season."

DCA also fielded a tennis team for the first time this spring, and it competed in bowling for the first time during the winter. Golf and track and field are relatively new sports, and boys soccer may be right around the corner as the school currently has a middle school soccer team.

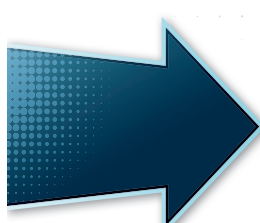
"We're just trying to give these kids opportunities," Lamb said.

Lamb used senior Jacob Rushing, who is playing baseball for the first time, as an example of the reason to do so.

"I was thinking about guys like Jacob. He's an athlete, he's strong, he's powerful. If he had been playing from the time he was in (middle school) there's no telling where he'd be," Lamb said. "And I've got middle schoolers that I don't want that to be the testimony in four years"



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