Westchester makes Johnson baseball coach

BY MICHAEL LINDSAY
ENTERPRISE SPORTS WRITER



MICHAEL LINDSAY | HPE

Chris Johnson has been named the new baseball coach at Westchester Country Day School. Johnson, who has expertise at a variety of levels, will lead the Wildcats with an experienced coaching staff.

HIGH POINT — Chris Johnson knows a good opportunity when he sees it.

He's spent much of his coaching career identifying and developing players — many of whom just needed a chance.

Which is what has led him to Westchester Country Day.

Johnson, alongside a talented, experienced coaching staff, looks to add his expertise to the strong foundation the Wildcats have built over the years as he becomes the program's new baseball coach.

"For me high school, especially at a place like this, is a chance for me to just get back to coaching, give back a lot of things I've experienced," he said. "I'm smart enough to have a lot of good college guys around me. Think about how unique that is — to have these guys around these guys.

"It's just a chance to go out and compete at a place that's been super successful for years and try to hopefully keep giving the school success and keep it rolling. It's a chance to get back on the field with kids and share your experience with them along with helping them."

Johnson, who lives in Clemmons, comes to Westchester with a lifelong background in baseball — his coaching stints in the Triad have included Piedmont International University (now Carolina University), Guilford College, Parkland High and North Forsyth High.

His father, Larry Johnson, played professionally for nearly a decade in the minor leagues. Johnson had a solid athletic career in his own right, a multi-sport athlete who was inducted into his high school hall of fame in Virginia. He later played baseball at Lenoir Community College and Southeastern College.

He's coached at high schools in Florida, Virginia and North Carolina — including the Dustin Ackley-led North Forsyth team that reach the regionals against Madison Bumgarner's South Caldwell team in 2006. He's also coached at stops like Wilkes Community College and Rockingham Community College.

"Growing up with a dad who was a professional athlete, I've always said it's like if you grow up and your dad's in finance," Johnson said. "Or if you grow up and your dad's a diesel mechanic, you're just going to kind of know about things because you're in the household with them.

"I think the luxury of my dad being in professional baseball for eight years as a player was I got such a realistic view of sports at a young age."

Johnson, who has mainly focused on pitching and recruiting but has coached a wide range of positions and skills, wants to bring his players an aggressive playing style and a level-headed approach.

"I think what guys like us bring to those guys is: 'Hey, guys, this ain't life and death,' " he said. "You're going to have good days, you're going to have bad days. How can we just stay pitch by pitch, out by out, inning by inning — just staying in the moment.

"You might come out and see us get our brains beat in. You might come out and see us beat somebody's brains in. And I'm just the same guy. Now when I come into practice the next day, it's going to be like, 'All right guys, we're going to have to get a lot cleaner right here.' But that's the day to do it."

Westchester has been a successful program in recent decades — winning state titles in 2012, 2013 and 2014 under Joey Hammond, now the coach at High Point University, and reaching the state final in 2023 under Rob Woodall. Last year, the Wildcats, under Frank Morelli, reached the state semifinals.

Johnson — whose son, Landon, played basketball at HPCA — will be joined by Nick Black (longtime coach at Guilford College), Kevin Jordan (who played at Wake Forest and has coached in Winston-Salem) and Aaron Pugh (whose family is heavily involved in baseball in Randolph County).

Morelli and assistant Donnie Sellers are expected to remain with the program.

The schedule will be challenging, Johnson said, with the goal of being ready for a competitive conference that includes crosstown rivals High Point Christian and Wesleyan Christian — both perennial state contenders — and ultimately the NCISAA 2A playoffs.

SEE **JOHNSON/PAGE A10**

JOHNSON

FROM **PAGE A6**

"I think you'll know my style has had some kind of effect on these guys when you come in late, if you kind of see us just playing through stuff," Johnson said. "If our energy doesn't change, regardless of whether we're up or down. So, that's where you'll know if I'm having an impact.

"I think we've got the talent to have a really good year."