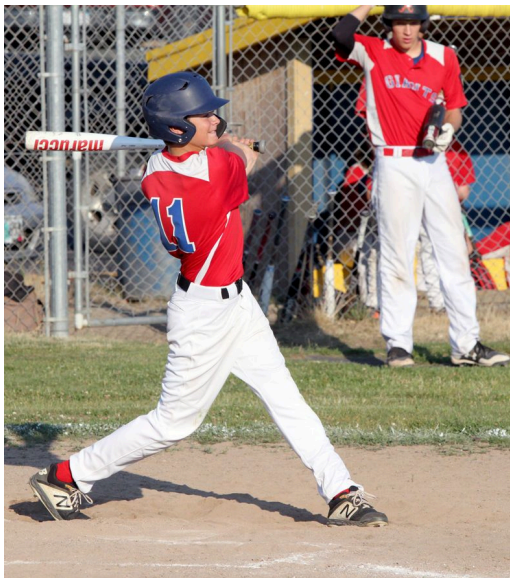


A summer with giants

July 10, 2019



The Del Norte varsity baseball team's season wrapped up in early May, but more than two months later a pair of Warriors are still on the diamond.

Kaden Ritter, who will be a senior this fall, and Jared Dixon, who played on the Del Norte varsity as a freshman during the spring, have been playing for the Northern Humboldt Giants 17 and under American Legion team with players from around Humboldt County, but mostly from Arcata and McKinleyville.

"It is fun because you know everybody and it is just a good time. It isn't as stressful as high school where the end goal is to get to the championship," Dixon said. "Here we are just having fun and working on what we need to work on."

Ritter said this is his first time teaming up with players from Humboldt, whom he spends most of the school year playing against in football and baseball.

"It is kind of weird at first, but it is fun now. They are all pretty cool," Ritter said. "It's a very fun group of people. Everyone is pretty good, so it has been a good season."

Although Dixon is a couple years younger than Ritter, he is more familiar with heading to Humboldt for baseball.

"I started playing down in Humboldt in Little League and I started playing with the [Humboldt] Steelheads travel team," he said. "After that I started playing legion."

Dixon spent the previous summer on the Northern Humboldt Knights, which is the feeder program for the Giants, but was able to grab a spot on the primeir team this summer.

Both Dixon and Ritter said they joined the Giants this season as a way to focus on improving for next year's high school team.

"In the summer you don't really ever do anything except sit around and maybe go to the river a couple times," Dixon said. "But this is like the whole summer — until the end of July —you play baseball and it gets you better."

Although Dixon has been playing summer ball in Humboldt for several years, it is Ritter's first go around.

Ritter said that following his White Star winning junior season, lots of coaches, including his father and Del Norte head coach Travis Johnson, encouraged him to continue playing through the summer.

"They said I was doing pretty good in baseball and thought I should take it to the next level and do more," Ritter said. "So that is why I came. I'm just trying to hit well and work on everything for the season for Del Norte. I'm trying to get everything right before next season — just get better."

Throughout the high school season Ritter played center field in every game for the Warriors while Dixon held down the hot corner at third base.

Though both players are getting ample playing time at their familiar positions with Northern Humboldt, they have also had the opportunity to try out a few other spots as well. In addition to center field, Ritter has been playing some at third base, while also pitching for the Giants. Dixon has played every position in the outfield for Northern Humboldt, while also spending time at second and third base.

"My main position is center field, but they have been flexing me around a lot," Ritter said. "I prefer center field, but when they need me I will go wherever."

Dixon said he believes that the extra experience in various positions will help to make him a more versatile player in the spring.

"It betters you as a player because if they need you somewhere else in high school they can put you out there and they know that you have played there before," Dixon said. "So you have more experience. So if I was to go from third base into the outfield I would still be alright at it because I have played it the whole summer."

Teaming up with players from Humboldt also makes for some extra fun match ups once the Humboldt-Del Norte Big 5 League season kicks off.

"It is fun to play against them when you get into the high school season," Dixon said. "You know what they have — like what pitches they throw and how they are. So you kind of know what to expect when you play them."

But before turning the page to the next school year, Ritter, Dixon and the rest of the Giants have some business to take care of. Northern Humboldt played in the American Legion district tournament last

weekend. After an opening round victory the Giants ran into the Humboldt Eagles where they picked up a loss and fell to the bottom of the double elimination bracket. The Giants were able to fight their way back through the lower bracket and into the championship game for a rematch against the Eagles.

There, Northern Humboldt managed to sweep the Eagles in two games to secure the district title.

As the district champion, the Giants will advance to the American Legion California Area 1 Tournament in Red Bluffs. The area tournament is scheduled to start on Thursday where the Giants will be playing Red Bluff's 16 and under team in the first round of the double elimination competition.

Reach Michael Zogg at mzogg@triplicate.com.