

Senior All Stars set to break new ground

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The Del Norte Senior Baseball All Star team are about to break new ground as the first Del Norte Little League team to compete at the West Regional when play kicks off in Sacramento on Thursday.

“We haven’t been this far before and we didn’t know we would be going this far,” said Del Norte manager Warren Loftin. “We have some pretty tough competition because we have a younger team, so we will definitely have our work cut out for us. The heat is going to be a part of it too, because it is going to be 100-plus over there and these kids aren’t used to that temperature.”

This is the first year that Del Norte Little League has included this age group, which had previously played in a Babe Ruth League. As it turned out, Del Norte was the only league in Oregon to form a senior all star team so they advanced unchallenged through both the district and state tournaments to automatically represent Oregon in the West Regional Tournament.

It has been roughly seven weeks since the end of the Del Norte Little League Regular season, and Loftin said the team has been practicing about five days per week, other than taking a few days off around the Fourth of

July.

“We have been focused on playing a lot of small ball, cutting down on errors, and working on out baserunning,” Loftin said. “We have been practicing a lot so they are coming along pretty well. It is just hard to know what we are going to face without playing any of them before.”

Although the Senior All Stars are for kids age 15 to 16, Loftin said Del Norte has only one 16-year-old on the team. Del Norte’s roster is also fairly small with just 10 players.

“We only have a 10-man group, so we have one sub,” Loftin said. “Most of these kids have played All Stars and went to state in the younger age groups, they just haven’t done it since they went to Babe Ruth because we didn’t do All Stars through Babe Ruth. So it is kind of a restart for them. We do have a lot of decent talent, they are just a bit smaller than what we will be facing. This is the first time this age group has played this far into the season because the Babe Ruth season ended in June and then everything was done. So this is more than an extra month of baseball that the community hasn’t done for a while for these age groups.”

Although the Del Norte Senior All Stars will be facing the unknown in Sacramento, Loftin said he feels like the team is relatively polished as they have been working on cutting down errors both in the field and on the bases.

“They don’t make a ton of errors, which should help us,” he said. “We don’t have a lot of power hitting so we have focused a lot more on better bunting and baserunning to play a smaller baseball. We want to keep ourselves on base and not give up outs when we shouldn’t.”

Without any precedent with which to compare, Loftin said the team is trying to keep its expectations low while looking forward to seeing what it can accomplish.

“We just want to keep a positive attitude and withstand the heat. Win or lose we are going to have fun and do the best that we can,” Loftin said. “The kids have a good attitude. We know that it is going to be a challenge, so we don’t want to over expect anything out of ourselves. We just want to hang in there and do the best that we can. It is a big stage for these kids.”

Del Norte’s game against the Arizona State Champions is scheduled to start at 1 p.m.

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