

By Joe Henderson

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As a junior at Franklin High School, Kolton Banfi really came into his own as a starting pitcher, helping the Knights reach new heights of success on the baseball diamond.



During that year, Banfi teamed with fellow starter Ian Haynes to form a formidable 1-2 punch, posting a record of 8-1 with 49 strikeouts and a 2.43 ERA after allowing only 14 earned runs and 12 walks in 40.1 innings pitched, as the Knights went all the way to the PIAA semifinals.

“Kolton was one of the hardest workers to ever come through our program,” Franklin head coach Brian Schmidt said. “He was a great leader and he was one of the toughest competitors, especially during his junior year where he and Ian Haynes led us to the state semifinals. Every time you put him on the mound, you knew he was going to throw strikes and just compete.”

That impressive season for Banfi and his teammates helped fuel the belief that he could pitch in the college ranks.

“That was amazing. That really sparked my baseball career, especially with COVID coming in a year later,” Banfi said of his junior campaign at FHS. “I saw what Ian was capable of and I saw what I was capable of, too, so just being able to go out there and

keep competing and showing off what I'd learned and what I'd embraced throughout my career was huge. It was just an amazing run that provided me with that last push forward to keep playing and move on to the next level."

Banfi and his teammates didn't get a chance to try and match or surpass their run the next year as the COVID pandemic wiped out his senior season.

"Even though we knew we were losing a couple of guys, we still had a lot of great all-around players coming back. Guys that enjoyed playing the game, playing with passion and putting in the work," Banfi said. "Even the younger guys coming in, we were all ready and we saw what we were capable of that first week of practice, and then it just got cancelled. It was definitely going to be promising and I felt like it was going to be a great year."

Losing that final year of high school didn't affect Banfi's passion for baseball as he moved on to pitch at Westminster College, recently capping off his graduate season in style as he set career school records for strikeouts and innings pitched while being named to the first team in the Presidents' Athletic Conference after posting a record of 5-1 with an ERA of 1.79.

"Going to Westminster was just a great experience all-together. The community over there is amazing. It's like family and it feels like home," Banfi said. "I had good coaches, they knew what they were talking about and they supported me. I also had great teammates, so it was all I could've wanted.

"During my career, I'd been in every situation, so in my final year at Westminster, I just went out there knowing what I'd accomplished in my time and knowing that there was

nothing for me to be afraid of,” he continued. “I’d practiced and put in a lot of hard work, so I just went out there with all the confidence in the world in my team and just executed.”

But, success didn’t come easy for him at first as he struggled a bit as a freshman, going 0-3 with an ERA of 8.16.

“I think the biggest thing for me was not leaving the ball over the middle of the plate,” he said. “It was just about hitting my spots and being disciplined. If I could go out there and hit my spots and be confident, I knew that’s what could make me successful.”

He didn’t struggle for long, though, as he got better each and every year, going 12-7 over the next three campaigns with an ERA of 2.92 during his fourth year.

“At the end of the day for me, it was just having a complete understanding of the game of baseball. When you’re on the mound, your goal is to be in the strike zone. Everybody wants to get strikeouts and have low walks, but if you're not in the strike zone, you can’t do that,” he said. “What I learned most is that there are eight other guys on the field with me to field the ground balls, so understanding that it’s a team sport and working together with the other guys made a big difference for me.”

Banfi finished his college career with a 17-11 record with six saves and an ERA of 3.62 after throwing 283.1 innings. He also finished with 184 strikeouts and only 81 walks.

“I’m not surprised by his success on the college level at all,” Schmidt said. “I’m sure on Day 1 when he showed up at Westminster as a freshman, the coaching staff found out pretty quick how special he was going to be, just the way he throws strikes and

competes. He hardly ever walked anybody, and that was probably his biggest gift. He was able to throw three pitches in the zone on any count and that made him really tough to hit against.”

Banfi credits his time playing at FHS with helping prepare him for the college level.

“”Coach Jordan Cherry and head coach Brian Schmidt really helped me embrace everything and give 110 percent,” he said. “I learned from them to never get frustrated, have confidence out there and throw your stuff. They really helped build up my confidence.”

Now that his playing days in college are over, Banfi isn’t ready to hang up his cleats just yet.

“I’m still going to try and move on and play semi-pro baseball, but right now I’m going to wait and do a tryout next year,” he said. “I had a couple of teams talking to me, but they were already at the start of their season. So I’m going to bulk up this offseason, get stronger, keep getting off the mound locally and go from there.”

But, no matter what happens with his playing career moving forward, Banfi has something solid to fall back on just in case.

“I have my woodworking business and I already have a couple of orders to fill out this summer. I can do anything you can imagine: Benches, tables, bars, and I’m doing hardwood flooring right now in a house,” he said. “I’m also finishing my MBA in business administration, so I’m looking to build up my business. Former Steelers offensive lineman John Malecki owns his own wood-working business and he told me

to get on social media, get my product out there and create a community for myself. I can start out small and build it up. That's my goal right now if baseball doesn't work out."

Banfi's old coach could also see him being involved in the coaching ranks as well in the future.

"Kolton comes around when he's home and helps out with our players, he even helps with the Little League players," Schmidt said. "He has a good knack for communicating with kids, he's personable, and the kids look up to him. We're hoping he's going to help us out next year, but if not next year, I know he will be in the future."