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## Making his pitch

Thursday, March 30, 2006

by Derek Toney  
Staff Writer

For some high school students, the proverbial light bulb turns on between their junior and senior years. For Pallotti's Travis Stewart, his moment of clarity came in his darkest moment.

Three years ago, Stewart's grandfather, John Showek, died. Showek was a constant presence at Stewart's baseball games. Today, he remains one of the biggest influences in Stewart's life.

"That really brought me into, 'do I want to make it or not?'" said Stewart. "My philosophy is when I'm not working there's another kid out there lifting weights or throwing."

Stewart is starting to see the fruits of his labor. The Panther senior is one of the county's top pitchers, and is on the path to a promising future.

Pallotti coach Pat Courtemache said Stewart is the best four-year varsity player he's coached.

"You're talking about a kid that was probably not even 6-feet tall when he was a freshman and weighed about 160 pounds," said Courtemache, in his fifth season. "He's grown a lot and has matured."

At 6-4 and 220 pounds, and possessing a fastball that tops out at nearly 90 miles per hour, Stewart has landed on the radar of several major league teams.

Though he's also attracted several Division I college scholarships, Stewart has given a verbal commitment to Northwest-Shoals Community College in Alabama.

"I want to keep open the possibility of signing with a JUCO to get drafted after my first or second year or transfer to a really good four-year school after that," said Stewart, who has offers from Delaware, Indiana, North Carolina-Asheville, Towson and West Virginia. "My family and I talked about it, and scouts



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Pallotti senior Travis Stewart is weighing his baseball future and hoping for a chance to play with a major college program or professionally.

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recommended I go to a good JUCO, and there's a good possibility I could get drafted after my freshman or sophomore year."

In his junior campaign at Pallotti last spring, Stewart posted a 6-0 mark with a 1.30 earned-run average with 60 strikeouts in 32 1/3 innings.

Along with Steve Henry (Villa Julie College) and last year's Star/Gazette player of the Year Joe Murray (Baltimore City Community College), Stewart was part of a staff that helped carry the Laurel school to an unbeaten season and the Maryland Interscholastic Athletic Association B Conference championship.

"Travis was in the background and he had a breakout year," said Courtemache. "He stepped up and was ready to play."

"We never really said who's No. 1, No. 2 or No. 3, we just said we have three of the best pitchers in the county," said Stewart, who had seven home runs and 37 runs batted in as a first basemen last season. "None of us minded who got this or got that. We had a core group of players who've played together since we were little, and I think that's what helped our success last year."

The Panthers are 3-3 after winning their league opener against Mount Carmel, 19-0, at Panther Park on Tuesday. Stewart, who pitched a two-hitter with 13 strikeouts in the win, said he doesn't feel the burden of being the ace.

"We're facing tough competition, but that's what we needed to get ready for conference games," said Stewart. "We all knew it would be hard to repeat what happened last year but we've got a good team. The talent is there."

Stewart entrenched himself as a player to watch with impressive showings at the Southern Maryland summer and winter showcases. While increasing his velocity by more than five miles per hour, Stewart said he's added a split changeup to his repertoire.

Though Stewart has dreams of playing professionally, he doesn't take anything for granted.

"I try not to get my hopes up, you never know what can happen," said Stewart. "My friends make a big deal of it. If I get drafted, great. It's another step in the right direction."

It's a path Stewart only wishes his biggest fan was around to enjoy. He wears a necklace that belonged to his grandfather and has "Pop" written on his cap.

"I wish he was here, and I think he would be so proud of me," said Stewart. "I do it for him."

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