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Neldon Represents DHS In Puerto Rico

AUGUST 01ST 2011 BY UNKNOWN

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By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports Editor

Dexter High School sophomore Cody Neldon just returned from a week-long baseball experience that he will never forget.

Neldon, the 15 year old son of Traci & Denny Christian of Dexter and Jamie & Jessica Neldon of Holcomb, just returned from a Coast to Coast Baseball camp held in Puerto Rico.

Based in Marietta (OH), the eight year old program has taken over 1600 players from 46 different states to compete in Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Australia and Puerto Rico. The organization's alumni now compete at every level of college baseball, and even professionally. Neldon showcased his skills for the Coast to Coast coaches at a tryout last fall held in Cordova, TN. At tryouts, players are evaluated in four areas: hitting, fielding, arm strength and speed.

“They usually look at smaller towns, where collegiate scouts typically don’t go,” Neldon noted. “They were trying to look at kids that didn’t get as much exposure because they live in a small town.”

Neldon noted the highly competitive nature of the tryouts, as well as the outstanding coaches he worked with.

“There were over 2,400 kids that tried out this year,” he said. “I was one of the 24 that made it on the U.S. team. Out of that 24, they made two teams of 12, with two coaches each. One of my coaches, James King, used to play for the L.A. Dodgers before he was injured. My other coach was Gary Bandy, who coaches at York College in Nebraska.”

“One of my really good friends that I’ve played baseball with for the last five or six summers, Dustin Houart from Holcomb, made the team as well.”

Neldon was presented with a full week of living and breathing baseball. They began each day with a three-hour practice session, and then had a few hours off to rest. During the afternoon and evening, teams were scheduled for double-headers every day. Mother Nature gave the athletes some adverse conditions during the trip, but Neldon and his teammates made the best of it.

images/Sports/Athlete Features/Cody Neldon/CN_Team.jpg

“It rained most of the time; we only got to play six games,” Neldon said. “It would be raining in San Juan and not in Caguas or vice versa, so one team would come in and play a game, and then another team would come in. That’s how we had to play most of the time; I think we actually got one doubleheader in the whole week. During one of our games at Roberto Clemente Stadium, it started raining during the game. It’s a turf field, so they pulled the tarps out, and they called the game. Then we went out and slid on the tarps.”

Neldon was able to fill an outfielder’s role, his natural position with the Bearcats, as well as several other positions.

“I played center field most of the time,” he said. “I played shortstop one game, and pitched a game to give some of the other guys’ arms a rest - I gave up one run in three innings.”

Neldon also performed well at the plate, hitting over .500 for the week.

Despite living the ‘baseball life’ for a week, Neldon will quickly have to convert to other sports - he’s a three-sport athlete! He’s a member of the basketball team, and led the JV squad to a successful showing in the Rib City Shootout the week after he returned from Puerto Rico.

Neldon also participated in the ‘Cats final football camp of the summer where he looks to land a starting spot as a wide receiver or in the defensive backfield. During baseball season, Neldon hopes to transition from an ‘off the bench’ role to becoming the everyday

starter in centerfield, which was vacated by a graduating Josh Sifford last season.

"I had a lot of fun while I was down there," Neldon said. "Hopefully what I learned will help me on the field next year."

Photos above:

Top Photo: Cody Neldon rounds third base during a DHS game against New Madrid County Central last year. Neldon, then a freshman, did an outstanding job coming off the bench for the 'Cats as both a backup player and a pinch-runner.

Bottom photo: Per the Puerto Rican tradition, teams exchange small gifts and gather for a group picture after a hard-fought battle on the baseball diamond. Neldon can be seen as the last player on the back row.

LAST UPDATED ON AUGUST 01ST 2011 BY STAFF WRITER

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