

ASHEVILLE AVALANCHE MAKING STRIDES IN NATIONS BASEBALL

The depth of talent in a relatively small area such as Asheville, North Carolina, makes fielding a competitive travel team difficult. Yet with consistent practice and the dedication of all players and parents, achieving success and learning some life lessons while on the diamond can be accomplished, which is what has taken place for the 12-and-under Asheville Avalanche over the course of 2009.

The team was formed early in the year after the Asheville River Bandits, an 11-and-under team, lost three players who decided travel ball was too much for their families and two others who looked for greener pastures. Another group of players were in the midst of forming a team, only to discover a merger of sorts could be made, consisting of young men in the South Buncombe district of Asheville.

The results have been encouraging, with the team winning the silver division in two of the five events the Avalanche played in the spring. The Avs then made huge strides during the first few tournaments in the fall, with the elite level squad in Nations Baseball defeating a couple of premier teams in the process. Here's an overview of how the ten Avalanche players are developing on the field.



CHRISTOPHER AKERS

Christopher Akers is one of the more versatile members of the Avalanche. He is an excellent first baseman and outfielder with a strong arm and good instincts for the game. His hitting tends to be streaky, but when he's hot, Christopher can drive the ball in the gaps and bring the runners around the bases. He runs the bags aggressively and is not afraid to steal home when a pitcher is

slow to the plate. Yet perhaps Christopher's best trait is his pitching. As an eight- and nine-year-old, he blew away the competition in all-stars with his fastball. No longer able to do that, he now mixes his pitches with impressive accuracy, and has developed a drop-ball that he uses as a change up. His best performance to date came in the Nations Baseball tournament in Gastonia, NC in September when he tossed a six-inning shutout versus a premier team from Charlotte.

Bryce Ballew is the leader of the defense as the shortstop who has productive at-bats and runs the bases as well as anyone on the team, even though his speed is only a tick above average. Bryce has excellent first-step quickness and knows the game so well that he is able to anticipate plays. A pop-up slide in the hole followed by a long, strong and accurate throw is one of his signature plays, although he is equally adept at going up the middle and making the throw across his body to nail the runner at first. An excellent bunter, Bryce puts the ball in play and is learning how to drive the ball with more consistency.



BRYCE BALLEW

Fearless on the field, he also serves as the Avalanche's late-inning pitcher due to his ability to force batters to hit the ball on the ground.

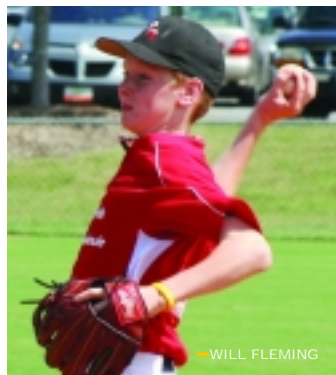
Trenton Davis joined the Avalanche in the fall of 2009 after crushing more than a dozen home runs for the River Bandits during the 2009 season. Trenton won the home run derby sponsored by Combat in Morganton, North Carolina, and Gastonia, North Carolina, in late August and mid-September, respectively, and gives the Avs the power presence in the middle of the lineup the team was missing this past spring. Overpowering as a pitcher during his early years of kid-pitch, Trenton has learned how to use change ups and other off-



TRENTON DAVIS

speed pitches to his advantage. His strong arm and soft hands make him a natural at third base, but his best position may be catcher, where he does an excellent job of working with the pitching staff and serving as one of the vocal leaders.

Will Fleming is the youngest member of the Avalanche, but he has the natural ability to compete with kids at any age group. Dominant as an all-star among 10-year-olds in the summer of 2009, "Will the Thrill" has discovered the nuances of baseball that had been lacking somewhat, which has helped him take his game to the next level. This past spring, he took over the duties in center field and developed into an outstanding defender in the middle garden. He turned two double plays by catching the ball in center and then nailing the runner at home plate with his strong and accurate arm. Will runs well with a long, gliding stride and will hit for more power as he continues to develop physically. He also showed in a Nations Baseball tournament in Gastonia that he has the ability to be a top-flight pitcher when he earned the victory with five strong innings on the mound.



WILL FLEMING

Nate Fore nearly quit playing baseball after a raw political experience in all-stars as a nine-year-old in 2007 but has since made as many strides in his development as anyone on the team. "Nate the Great" has demonstrated an increase in power and arm strength thus far in the fall with a handful of long balls that just missed clearing the fences at 240+ feet. Underrated by the masses due to his quiet demeanor, Nate could play anywhere



NATE FORE



→ ZAK LINTZ

on the field, but excels at third base and the outfield and has shown the ability to be a solid defender at the other three infield spots as well. He does an excellent job of picking balls out of the dirt on the short hop, and his quick reflexes allow him to turn would-be hits into outs. In addition to displaying more power at the plate, Nate has come through with numerous big hits with runners in scoring

position late in contests.

Zak Lintz is the newest member of the Avalanche after encountering a difficult experience on another travel team in the spring. "The Zak Attack" is a steady defender at first base, a very good left-handed pitcher with a deft pick-off move to first, and an improving hitter who needs to maintain his confidence and mechanics in order to become a force at the plate. The Cincinnati native is always the first one to practice and is as dedicated as any member of the team in becoming a better player with his tireless desire to improve his game. His tremendous will to play was seen during a tournament in Gastonia in mid-September when he dove for a shot down the right-field line, only to have the ball bounce and hit his sunglasses. The lens of his glasses sliced his right eyelid and later required stitches, yet he was determined to keep playing. Although he missed the last two innings of that contest, Zak was back on the field less than an hour later in the after piece of the back-to-back tilts.

John Grant Manley was nicknamed "Chester Cheetos" by former major league outfielder Chuck Jackson during a clinic in 2008. The player known more commonly as "J.G." is in many ways a jack of all trades for the Avalanche.

He is one of the team's three catchers and one of the top three pitchers who also does an excellent job in the outfield. J.G. also has seen some activity at third base and second base this fall and performed admirably and efficiently despite having limited experience at those spots. One of the fastest members of the Avalanche, John Grant can be one of the team's best base runners, but must maintain his focus, particularly in terms of knowing the game situation. A slashing hitter from the left side of the plate, J.G. opened the fall season as one of the team's most consistent batters and top run producers by drilling pitches to all fields.

Christian Nichols is the ace of the Avalanche pitching staff. Employing a delivery that is eerily similar to that of Tim Lincecum, Christian frustrates hit-

ters with his quick-paced approach, which his fielders appreciate, especially on hot days. By mixing an excellent fastball, a new change up and a wicked knuckle ball, Christian can border on being dominant when he keeps his offerings down in the strike zone. He also fields his position at pitcher very well and does an outstanding job of limiting the opponents' running games. Christian tends to be streaky at the plate, but has excellent and somewhat surprising power and is a fast and aggressive runner on the base paths. He is probably the team's best base stealer, but needs to make certain of the game situation on those occasions when he runs on his own. Defensively, Christian is a good first baseman and has the ability to be a great outfielder once he embraces the position. He showed that in Gastonia by gunning down a pair of base runners from right field.

Daniel Trizano is the most exciting player on the Avalanche. If Danny's uniform isn't dirty by the end of the first inning, something must be wrong. "The Flying Trizano," according to J.G., "is like seeing a circus act for free." With absolutely no regard for his body, Danny makes diving grabs throughout the infield as well as on those occasions when he fills in at center field. His signature head-first slides and outstanding speed constantly put pressure on opposing defenses. An accomplished bunter and a true lead off hitter, Danny also has above-average power at the plate, but needs to lay off the high pitches in order to improve his batting average. A steady glove man with a strong arm at third base, Danny turns the double play at second base as well as anyone his age. His range with his constant motion and ability to keep control while diving to make plays gives the entire Avalanche team energy and helps spur them on to victory.

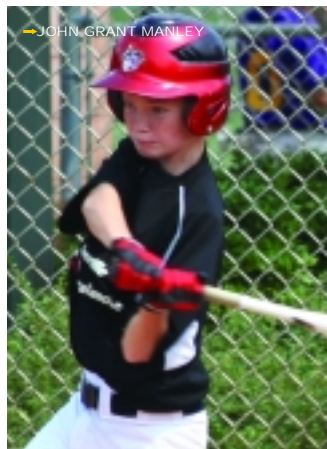
Bo Wiggins is the team's top catcher, particularly after making impressive strides behind the plate during the first month of the fall season. Steady and dependable while wearing the tools of ignorance throughout the spring, "Bo Bo" has taken his defense to another level in September and October with his ability to block balls in the dirt and throw out would-be base stealers. He has developed a quicker release and lost the loop in his tosses, which has made him one of the more mechanically sound receivers in the state. Bo is also a steady outfielder and a good first baseman. An excellent relief pitcher, he has not been able to hone his skills on the mound due to his near-constant presence on

the other end of the battery. He has excellent power and does a good job of hitting the ball back up the middle. Bo is also an aggressive base runner who has solid speed, yet uses his intelligence and willingness to take the extra base.

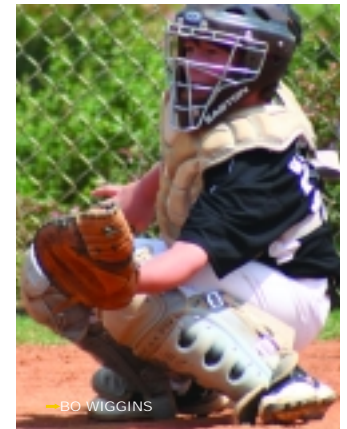
After playing through mid-November this fall, the Avalanche have plans to play in approximately ten tournaments next spring before culminating the season in July with a trip to the Cooperstown Dreams Park for one of the 12-and-under five-day events.



→ DANIEL TRIZANO



→ JOHN GRANT MANLEY



→ BO WIGGINS



→ CHRISTIAN NICHOLS