Summer baseball options available

Area prospects can play for their school teams or with select teams

By Josh Hall

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Rogersville High School senior-to-be Joe Young has been on both sides of the summer baseball scene.

Last year, Young played a few games with the Midwest Nationals, which has sent several players to the MLB Draft and to college rosters.

This year, Young is playing with his school’s summer team.

“The competition is better (with the Nationals), but it’s not as big of a difference as someone would think,” Young said.

Prep players have more opportunities to get noticed by college coaches than ever.

With this in mind, the 40th annual Price Cutter Holiday Tournament, which began Wednesday and continues through Sunday, has brought in more competition in recent years.

According to Springfield Area Baseball Association Vice President Steve Brewer, the tournament started attracting better teams when pool play began in recent years.

The event was previously double-elimination, keeping many teams from traveling without a guarantee of games, Brewer said.

As a result, several junior varsity teams filled the empty slots.

Last year, the tournament added a showcase camp held at Meador Park. It will be held today and should bring in 10-15 college coaches, Brewer said.

“It gives the young men a chance for a little more exposure,” SABA commissioner Nolan McCaulley said. “We have always had college coaches coming to the tournament and just observing. This way it gives them a chance to see the kids actually doing what they can do on a more individual level.”

Young, a collegiate baseball prospect, said the ability to play summer basketball with the Wildcats also was a factor in sticking close to home.

“We don’t play in as many tournaments as the Nationals, but it’s still filling up my summer and allows me to play basketball and baseball during the weekend,” he said.

Many other elite prep players – such as Parkview’s Spencer Johnson, Nixa’s Dean Deetz, and Catholic’s Austin Tribby – are playing with the Nationals this summer.

Since the program launched in 2002, 68 players have gone on to play for NCAA Division I programs and 28 have been drafted according to the team’s website.

Carthage junior-to-be Drew Bridges, who plays for the Midwest Twins, said his decision to play on a travel ball team was based on the level of competition.

“You see better pitchers, better fielders, better hitters,” said Bridges, ranked as the 37th best prospect statewide in his class by Missouri Prep Baseball Report.

Kickapoo High School baseball coach Jason Howser believes in the old saying: If you’re good enough, they are going to find you.

Like Kickapoo, many local summer teams travel to various tournaments to get players exposed to recruiters at all levels.

“I think everything is cause and effect,” Howser said. “I think the day and age of college recruiters, from out of the area, going to a legion game on a Tuesday night isn’t going to happen as much.

“In turn, we have to react to it.”

The tournaments have also raised the level of competition for high school summer teams looking to prepare for next spring.

While not as common nationally as showcase tournaments, another option is showcase camps.

Last week, 36 local players attended one organized by PBR at Price Cutter Park in Ozark. Each athlete was put through a professional-style workout and given an evaluation at the end of the camp.

Ethan Silverman of Missouri PBR said the evaluations and a list of the event’s top 10 players would be sent to college coaches.

“These guys know coaches from around the nation,” said Chandler Hall, one of seven players from Kickapoo to attend the camp. “Events like this give you more exposure whether it be professional or college scouts.”