

2010 BASEBALL MVPS

Class 3A Ajay Pizza, Juan Diego, infield

With Luke West, Kody Davis and A.J. Begay on the same team, it's hard to stand out. Ajay Pizza stood out, becoming a big bat in the middle of the order, thanks to a revamped swing, and a defensive presence in the infield. He was a leader, and he was one who helped the club's transition from long-time coach Steve Cramblitt to Troy Davis.

"This season was a big change for us," Pizza said. "Coach Cramblitt is a legend and he was a great coach for us. Coach Davis came in and did a great job."

With the talent that Juan Diego had, winning a second consecutive Class 3A state title may have seemed like a likely conclusion to some. But Pizza came up big when it counted. His RBI double in the state title game against Canyon View sparked a 5-1 win. He was nothing short of solid in the state tournament and that's the reason he will be playing next season at Creighton University.

"I really thought I was going to have a good season," Pizza said. "I changed my swing in the middle of last year, I started to make more contact with the ball and I was elected captain. As a team, we put a lot of work into this season, and I thought we really played well as a team."



Infielder Ajay Pizza provided a big bat in the middle of the lineup for Juan Diego this season.

AL HARTMANN | The Salt Lake Tribune

Class 2A Nache Nielson, San Juan, pitcher



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San Juan's Nache Nielson led the state's pitchers with 13 wins this season, while also providing power at the plate.

The image is a lasting one for Nache Nielson. It's also an indelible one. It's the picture of Kanab celebrating at the pitcher's mound after the 14-13 win over San Juan in what was one of the best playoff games in state history.

Nielson and his team came up short that day in 2009. As a senior this season, he was determined not to come up short again. "This state title was worth the wait," Nielson said. "It was great because we got to go through Kanab to get there."

Nielson was wonderful on the mound this season.

He led the state in wins with 13. He batted .500 at the plate. He came up with six home runs. He knocked home a bunch of runs while he was at it. In the state title game, a win over Parowan, he pitched the final three innings.

That's quite a résumé. Along the way, he proved himself to be a leader, to be versatile, to be clutch and dominant at the same time.

Losing that game to Kanab in 2009 served as quite the motivating factor for Nielson.

He simply was determined not to go through something like that again.

Class 4A Adam Duke, Spanish Fork, pitcher

This was the pressure facing Adam Duke coming into the season. He was expected to be the best player in the state.

He was expected to lead Spanish Fork back to the state title. He was expected to finally emerge from the shadow of his older brother Brock, who won the Class 5A MVP last season. He was expected to do this with several younger teammates entering the lineup.

Despite all of this so-called pressure, Duke was nothing short of astounding. He went 11-0 as the best pitcher in the state, regardless of class. He played multiple positions, he was efficient at the plate and he produced whenever called upon.

Take the state title game for example.

In a win over Springville, Duke's single to left field in the bottom of the seventh inning sent the game into extra innings and the Dons were able to prevail in the bottom of the eighth.

"There was nobody that I wanted at the plate other than Adam Duke," Spanish Fork coach Jim "Shoe" Nelson said. "There was no doubt that he was going to come through in that situation."

For all of his prowess at the plate, the reason that Duke was a 16th-round pick of the Boston Red Sox in the Major League Baseball draft is a simple one: He can pitch and pitch well.

With a fastball in the low 90s, a solid slider and a



Spanish Fork's Adam Duke, who went 11-0 on the mound this season, was drafted by the Boston Red Sox.

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curveball that drops without warning, Duke has made his reputation on the mound.

He leaves Spanish Fork as the all-time winningest pitcher in school history.

Class 5A Dillon Robinson, L. Peak, shortstop

Whatever the definition of an MVP, Dillon Robinson has more than lived up to it this season. Over the course of the spring, Robinson was one of the best hitters in the state. His numbers were truly tough to match. The Brigham Young signee hit .532. He came up with 14 home runs, and 35 RBIs. He played a very good shortstop, and he was the ultimate leader in the clubhouse.

Impressive, right? Well, take this into account: Robinson also developed into a money closer. And that ability to come into a game in the late innings and shut the door on the opposition is what turned Lone Peak from a great hitting team into the well-rounded juggernaut that fought its way to a state championship.

"Coming into the season, we wanted to win the championship," Robinson said. "Anything less was going to be a big disappointment for us. We wanted to be the ones that were celebrating at the end. I made up my mind that I was going to do anything I could to make that happen. If that called for me to pitch, that's what I was going to do."

Robinson put those words into action during the playoffs, saving three of the Knights' wins and closing out the state title game. Robinson was at his best when the stage was at its brightest.

—Stories by Tony Jones



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Lone Peak's Dillon Robinson, one of the best hitters in the state, also developed into an effective closer.

COACH OF THE YEAR

Bonneville coach turns team around

Howell guides team to biggest turnaround in the state this year.

By TONY JONES
The Salt Lake Tribune

Three wins a season ago. A team with four seniors. A first-year coach. On paper, not much hope at all.

If any team had an excuse to not do well this season, it was Bonneville. To say the Lakers flew under the radar heading into this season is a vast understatement. To say Bonneville wasn't even thought of? Well, yes, that's a little more like it.

Yet the Lakers were the surprise team in the entire state this year. They proved not to

be bound for the basement of Region 5. They proved to be more than respectable. They proved to be champions. In all, the Lakers won 20 games this year, 18 in the regular season.

In all, they had the biggest turnaround in the state this spring.

Because of this, Trevor Howell is *The Salt Lake Tribune's* high school baseball coach of

the year.

Howell accomplished what he did by putting a team on the field that had one simple word in mind: belief. He got his players to believe in his system.

He got his players to forget that they were extremely young. He coaxed his players to believe that they could be competitive at the highest

level.

As a result, Bonneville put out a team that was aggressive and productive offensively. Junior infielder Sam Hall completed a great season by hitting .409 at the plate with 11 homers and 37 runs batted in.

Austin Land made the move to leadoff hitter and produced seven homers. As a

team, the Lakers fielded one of the best offensive lineups in the state, scoring 10 runs or more a stunning 14 times.

Howell was at the center of this, mixing and matching his players, creating the right chemistry and orchestrating a culture that saw Bonneville win two games in the Class 4A state tournament.