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**NEWS RELEASE**

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## **COULD THIS BE THATCHER'S YEAR IN BASEBALL?**

PHOENIX, AZ (April 30, 2009) – Thatcher High School has had a long run of excellence in athletics. The boys' teams have won championships in football, basketball and track.

The baseball team has come close to earning a banner, finishing as state runner-up in 1982, 2000, 2002 and 2005. This season, the team is poised to break through and take the Class 2A title trophy home.

Thatcher had a 19-4-1 record in the regular season and was third in the Arizona Interscholastic Association's power points system. It was 12-0 in the 2A East Region, which holds its region tournament on Friday and Saturday at Willcox High. The state tournament begins May 8 at the Peoria Sports Complex.

Ryan Felker took over as Thatcher's head coach this season, replacing Ramon Morales. Felker was the former head football coach at Goodyear Desert Edge (he also had coached baseball and softball there) and came to Thatcher as an assistant football coach at Eastern Arizona (junior) College.

"When I came here, it wasn't a case of righting the ship, not at all," Felker said. "Coach Morales did a great job."

Felker wanted to spruce things up and had new dirt put on the baseball field, had many of his players to participate in the Baja Baseball Academy in Tucson, where Thatcher was the only 2A team, and helped prepare the players' arms with a six-week throwing program.

"I think that in a small way, the improved field condition helped us defensively," Felker said.

Thatcher has 14 players on the varsity, 10 of them seniors.

"There are no captains. All of them have input. I have an open-door policy," Felker said. "It seems that every game we have somebody different step up in terms of what they do on the field and with leadership."

Thatcher has a balance on the pitching mound with left-hander Joe Hollowell and right-hander Landon Williams. Both players also are strong hitters.

"Both are very good. I usually tell everyone we have two No. 1 pitchers," Felker said.

Hollowell is expected to begin his college career at Yavapai (junior) College in Prescott, and Williams likely will play football at Eastern Arizona before heading off on a Mormon mission.

Although Thatcher will lose most of its players to graduation, Felker is secure in the fact that the program will be infused with a talented group of players from a successful junior-varsity program, which features sophomores and freshmen.

"We have a couple of varsity pitchers coming back, but we also should get two or three more good ones from the JV that will help us next year," Felker said.

As for this year, Felker and his players are ready to challenge some of the private schools from the metropolitan areas that have developed strong programs.

“Many of our kids have chips on their shoulders. They want to prove they can play, too,” Felker said.

Thatcher’s only losses have been to Class 4A Division II Sahuarita, Class 3A Globe and Snowflake and 2A Kearny Ray.

“I don’t feel like we have been up and down. We have been pretty consistent,” Felker said. “One thing about our guys is their competitiveness and desire to win, which I haven’t seen in a team in a long time. They hate to lose.

“They are tremendous athletes and they all understand the big picture, what it takes to lift each other up when they need it.”

Thatcher will spend the days leading up to the region tournament working on fundamentals, including watching video of their swings.

“Just working on the little things,” Felker said. “We want to be ready. We will be ready.”

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