



Facing Butler a tall task, with or without 6-9 ace

Sophomore pitcher Cherry just one reason Aviators have flown to the top of GWOC North this year.

By [Marc F. Pendleton](#), Staff Writer 11:19 PM Monday, April 26, 2010

VANDALIA — A warning should come with Vandalia Butler pitcher Taylore Cherry: Dig in at your own risk.

The sophomore has emerged as the area's best underclassman recruit midway through this high school baseball season. That's understandable, considering his fastball has been clocked at 92 mph.

That kind of firepower draws a lot of recruiting attention. And so does his presence on the mound.

At 6 feet 9, Cherry is the Greater Western Ohio Conference version of former big-league pitcher Randy Johnson, a fireballing 6-10 giant.

And Cherry is just wild enough to be scary good.

“I’ve hit quite a few people, actually,” Cherry said Monday, April 26, after Butler’s game at Piqua was rescheduled to today.

“I’d just say that sometimes I’m effectively wild.”

Cherry (3-2) is just one of several reasons the Aviators are a GWOC North Division-leading 7-1 and 12-7 overall. Senior pitcher Nick Hansman (5-0) has been unbeatable, and senior outfielder Trey Clements ignites everything offensively from his leadoff spot.

That all adds up to a winning combination — more often than not — for Butler.

Hansman is the overachieving senior with a variety of offerings and of whom veteran Vandalia coach Trent Dues said, “I wouldn’t have bet on him as a freshman that he would ever play varsity ball.”

Clements is a rare three-year starter who keeps his leadoff role simple: “My job is to score early and often,” he said.

But it’s Cherry who brings the X-factor — and heat — to Butler’s roster.

He claims to have four pitches, but there’s only one that matters, his fastball. Add a dash of wildness and Cherry is as menacing as it gets for a 6-9 right-handed pitcher whose heaters are wrapped in plenty of velocity.

“At first it’s kind of scary,” said Clements, when asked about hitting against Cherry.

“It’s like he’s throwing right on top of you.”

Dues has groomed this kind of promising potential before in lefty pitcher Cory Vance (’97 Butler grad) and Adam Kirkendall (’99). Vance starred at Georgia Tech before pitching in 11 games with the Colorado Rockies. Kirkendall, like Cherry a power pitcher, excelled at Louisiana Tech.

“He’s getting a lot of looks,” said Dues of Cherry. “Obviously, a 6-9 pitcher who has topped out at 92 mph, well, that’s pretty intriguing. He gets on top of that hill and he’s a Paul Bunyan out there.

“Sometimes a little wildness isn’t a bad thing. He’s effective but he’s also a work in progress. He has a chance to play big-time college ball.”

Dues thinks Cherry can throw in the high 90s as a senior. There’s no way of checking if any local high school pitcher has ever surpassed 100 mph, but it’s doubtful.

Besides his rocket, Cherry also has a curveball, change-up and sidearm heater.

That assortment of pitches has enabled him to strike out 39 batters in 291/3 innings with a 2.15 ERA. By comparison, Hansman has whiffed 41 in 40 innings with a 1.40 ERA. That’s an effective 1-2 pitching punch that is so important for the postseason.

Batters know what’s coming from Cherry. But from Hansman it’s any combination of six pitches from all angles.

“(Hansman) has just worked and worked and worked,” Dues said.

“He’s just an absolute workaholic. He’s the hardest worker that I’ve ever coached. The success that he’s having is kind of refreshing.”

It’s up to rotating catchers Vinnie Jackson and Ryan Keeler to keep Cherry and Hansman around the plate. Dues relays pitches to the catcher, who then signals to the pitcher.

Cherry will split time with the Cincinnati Flames and Midland 16U teams this summer. This fall he’ll be on the traveling Midwest Redbirds, an independent club that draws players from Ohio, Indiana and Michigan.

That kind of exposure to other great players — and scouts — should help him land even brighter on the recruiting radar.

So will a deep high school postseason.

“We’re playing great and our defense is doing amazing,” Cherry said.

“We’re smoking the ball everywhere. Hopefully, this carries on in the tourney season and we can make a good run.”

