



New Mexico Activities Association Student Spotlight

When Sports Cross International Waters

By Andreas Steinmetz

It may be called “America’s pastime,” but fortunately for Alex Bates of Ruidoso High School, the game of baseball has global appeal. Alex started playing baseball at a young age in Japan, where he was born to an American father and a Japanese mother. Moving to America as a middle school student brought on the challenge of learning a new culture.

“I have played baseball since I was three years old. My dad entered me into a little recreational team and I just started picking the game up then.” Alex played baseball in Japan until his family moved to Ruidoso when he was 12. His time playing overseas gave him a foundation and love for the game that he has kept while playing in high school. “There, they teach you to respect the game, respect your equipment, respect your coaches and respect your teammates.”

His parents didn’t have to convince Alex to move to America, but there was the shock of moving to a new country. “I thought it was a great idea because I am half from the states and half from Japan, but coming off the plane in Albuquerque, I was like, “Wait, we are living in the desert,” because in Japan, there are oceans all around.” For Alex, the culture shock came in the way of peoples choices. “In Japan, it’s just that everyone takes care of the little details. It is more about having the simple stuff and seeing if you can get by with that. When you come over here, it’s like the bigger the better and everyone has big trucks, big cars, and all this elaborate stuff.” For Alex, he says it is a good change and enjoys his opportunity in Ruidoso. “It is a tight-knit community and everybody knows everybody. It’s really fun to be part of it and the scene. We have a field right by a golf course, with mountains surrounding it and it’s a really good place to play baseball. It really inspires you to play better just looking around you.”

After a slow start to the 2015 campaign, with a record of just 2-6, the Ruidoso Varsity Baseball team turned the season around. The program saw its first district championship and continued on to the state title game against Sandia Prep, coming up short against the big arm of Joe Martinez. “Winning district for the first time ever in our baseball program’s history was great, but Martinez’s arm was the best arm we saw all year long. We could have hit him but we just weren’t prepared mentally.”

A successful run like that of the 2015 Ruidoso HS baseball team will surely bring on its challenges for the next season. The squad lost nine seniors and Bates will be one of only six returners from that runner-up team, and with that, comes the pressure of being the team leader. “Obviously I’m the leader, but I just have to put emphasis on how we practice and the intensity level we have during practice.” When underclassmen teammates get excited and caught up in the moment, Alex, the team’s starting shortstop, says, “I like to slow things down, calm them down, and explain what is going to happen. Make sure before each big situation, they know what they have to do and where they have to go in this certain situation. I also have a great catcher in Kyler Woodul. He’s a junior as well and he and I just do whatever it takes to orchestrate the team; just be the leaders on the field.”

When talking about the other teams that will make the state tournament, Bates says, “Everyone has that mentality that



they are going to be the next state champion. We just have to give them that mindset that we are going to win state and we are the team to beat, even though our seeding or our record may not show it. We have to believe that we are the team to beat and we are going to take it all."

Alex is currently hitting .464 with 26 runs batted in, second and first respectively on the team. He credits his success at the plate this year to "having a plan" and his coaches' saying of "it's not little league anymore." Bates stated, "You can't just roll out there without having a plan and expect to hit .500." Alex continued by saying he has been simplifying and focusing on the ball, having the right mindset and flipping the switch every time he plays."

In his time at Ruidoso High School, Alex was also part of the football team that won the class 4A state championship in 2014. "That was a once in lifetime opportunity. It was great to be part of that team to know what it feels like to win and to know what it takes to get there in all the sports in which I participate. It was a great learning experience."

The responsibilities of being an athlete and learning in different cultures, has taught Alex the importance of his education. "Being in Japan, everyone is so focused on their schooling. My parents have been on me about reading books or doing extra studies. They have been great throughout my life to get my life straightened out through education and sports. There's a point where obviously being a teenager, there's a part of you that doesn't want to do your school work, but you just have to embrace the hard work and know what it actually means. It is a student-athlete and not an athlete-student, so education comes first."

After his days of high school and college are over, Alex would like to coach. "I love helping kids. Playing baseball throughout my life, I can't just walk away from it. I just want to be involved in the game and coach kids and help them try to achieve their dreams like all the coaches try to do with mine. I'd like to return the favor. I think I would just love that job."