

## Feathers in their caps: Del Grande's Crusaders No. 1 in Division V

Neil Tarpey/The Times-Standard

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It was well-earned, not much of a surprise.

On June 14, when CalHiSports.com named St. Bernard's as its No. 1 baseball team in California Division V, the honor did not come out of left field.

After all, the Crusaders (21-1) had just earned their third consecutive North Coast Section championship, with their only loss coming at the hands of Miramonte (23-3-1), the NCS Division III champion.

For St. Bernard's head coach Dale Del Grande, being named top team in the state was all about the players and coaches, not himself.

"It's a feather in the cap for all the players and the coaches," said Del Grande. "To put us up there is quite an honor."

By "up there," Del Grande was referring to the fact that, although St. Bernard's won the 2007 and 2008 Class B championship, and the 2009 Division VI title, they were selected as the top team in Division V.

Numerically speaking, it means that a Division VI (less than 200 students) school-- cifncs.org listed St. Bernard's as having 138 students -- was considered the best of even the Division V schools (201-410 students).

"I've been blessed with a lot of talented players, and with a close-knit coaching fraternity," he added.

As for himself, Del Grande said, "Fear of losing is what motivates me. I don't want to lose."

Del Grande credits the great work of Justin Andersen, who has been an assistant coach for three years, and especially coaches Buster Pidgeon and Greg Shanahan.

"The respect that they get from the players is incredible," said Del Grande. "They're both very positive guys.

"Buster's credentials speak for themselves," said Del Grande about the Eureka High alumnus. "He was on the '68 American Legion team that won the state (title), and he played minor league ball with the Philllies.

"He's had our hitters take an aggressive approach to hitting. I think he says, 'Swing the bat. Good things can happen.'"

Shanahan, a St. Bernard's Hall of Fame alumnus, pitched in 11 games for the Los Angeles Dodgers during the 1973 and 1974 seasons.

"He has really helped our pitchers," said Del Grande, noting Shanahan's influence on everything from pitching form to throwing a good curveball.

Don't expect Del Grande -- whose phenomenal 79-11 (.877) record in his four years at the helm for St. Bernard's shows that he hasn't lost too many times -- to take his players or coaches for granted.

Even if they are ranked No. 1 in California.