

# Brakeley took time to get act under control

By KEVIN TRESOLINI

Staff reporter

Bill Brakeley says he's been throwing baseballs — in his backyard or on a diamond — "since I've been able to walk."

Only recently, however, has the 6-foot-4, 190-pound left-hander begun keeping most of the batters that he faces from walking.

In fact, the 1986 St. Andrew's School graduate also has kept a decent share of hitters from even making contact, as his 126 strikeouts in 61 innings — more than two per inning — this past season indicate.

"I was more feared in Little League because I was out of control," said Brakeley, who'll pitch for the Blue in Saturday's ninth annual Blue-Gold High School All-Star Game, starting at 11 a.m. at St. Andrew's. "I hit a lot of guys."

Brakeley now has control, which is what makes the difference between a good pitcher who can throw heat and a bad one. During the past two years, Brakeley became a good one, a pitcher who can deliver a baseball at close to 90 mph while picking out the corners of the plate.

He issued 33 walks in those 61 innings this spring. He foreshadowed his outstanding senior season with a 102-strikeout effort, walking 37 in 74½ innings, in his junior year at the Middletown boarding school.

"I didn't start throwing hard until two years ago," said Brakeley, whose repertoire includes overhand, sidearm and submarine curveballs with different trajectories and a changeup to go with his fastball. "I was kind of clumsy. I was tall and gangly and I had to grow into my body. I couldn't play basketball because I couldn't control myself. My arms and legs would be all over the place."

Along with his physical maturity, Brakeley credits his outstanding senior season to knowing the hitters, many of whom aren't used to batting against a lefty. Brakeley, in turn, pitches against so many right-handed batters that he'd rather face one of them than a lefty.

"I like to work the outside corners, but I have a hard time finding them with a left-handed batter," Brakeley said.

He also benefited from devoting some off-season time to pitching into a suspended strike zone constructed of string at school, but still

felt rusty in the early-season cold weather.

"I actually walked more batters at the beginning of this season when it was cold," Brakeley said. "I got better when it got hot. I like pitching best when I'm dripping with sweat."

The New Canaan, Conn., resident struck out 18 batters in two separate seven-inning games this spring. In his three years on the St. Andrew's varsity, he won 20 games and struck out 287 batters while being named first-team All-State twice. He was honorable mention as a sophomore.

The three-time first-team All-Independent Conference selection also finished 1986 with a .357 batting average, two homers and 16 RBI. He played first base when he didn't pitch.

There were some important people — professional scouts — who noticed Brakeley's accomplishments.

But before his senior season, in which he was 7-4 — a victim of unearned runs in 5-4, 2-0 and 1-0 losses — with a 1.61 ERA, Brakeley had already decided that his next stop would be the College of Wooster in Ohio, not a minor-league outpost. Wooster has one of the nation's top NCAA Division III baseball programs.

"My first intention back in the fall was toward academics, so I applied early decision to Wooster," said Brakeley. "When you apply early decision and get accepted you've got to go. I didn't expect to get all the attention I got this spring. I couldn't back off though, because I made a commitment to Wooster."

Aside from not getting the chance to test his value on the major-league and major-college markets, Brakeley is content with his decision.

"It would have been interesting to see if I was drafted and how much I was offered and if any Division I colleges were after me," he said. "But I don't regret deciding to go to Wooster. I can't wait to get there."

St. Andrew's Coach Bob Colburn said several professional scouts made inquiries about Brakeley's availability.

"They [scouts] were honest with me and I tried to be honest with them," said Colburn, whose 1986 club finished 10-8. "We told them there was a 99-percent chance he was going to college and it might not be worth it to draft him."



Staff photo by Chuck McGowen

Bill Brakeley has harnessed control problems to pitch effectively.