

Times-Dispatch 2010 All-Metro baseball team

Cosby's Shifflett All-Metro baseball player of year

A mere 90 feet of dirt separates first and second base -- hardly enough distance to keep Mitchell Shifflett, one of the best base stealers the Metro area has ever had, from burning rubber on the base paths whenever the mood strikes him.

"I think he's the best one in the 20-some years that I've done this," Cosby coach Tim Lowery said. "He just had a natural ability." With a moderate lead and a good jump, Shifflett blurred from one base to the next. Only one catcher -- Godwin's George Moore -- was able to throw him out all season. That left the U.Va.-bound center fielder 37 for 38 in stolen base attempts. "We recruited him because athletically, he is very, very gifted," Virginia coach Brian O'Connor said. "He can really, really run." The VHSL doesn't keep a record of stolen bases, so it's impossible to see how Shifflett compares with history. But there's one distinction Shifflett has set in stone -- Times-Dispatch All-Metro player of the year. When a batter can automatically turn a single into a double, scoring runs becomes much easier. That's why Shifflett scored 36 runs and Cosby won the Central Region championship this year. "Every time he got on, in my mind, I knew he was going to get to second and we were going to manufacture a run," Lowery said. Shifflett is so fast that his teammates had a superlative for him: "Fastest player in the country." Only, it might not be an exaggeration. About a year ago, he went to the Perfect Game national showcase at the Metrodome in Minneapolis. The country's largest scouting service, Perfect Game invites some of the nation's top talent to show their mettle in front of scouts. There, Shifflett ran the 60-yard dash in 6.11 seconds, the fastest time recorded in Perfect Game showcase history. "I got the right step at the end and I crossed the line, I guess, perfectly and 6.11 came up," Shifflett said. "Everyone was cheering." He broke the previous record of 6.17, set in 2008 by Xavier Avery, who is currently in the Baltimore Orioles' farm system. He also beat the times of brothers Justin (6.21) and B.J. Upton (6.22), who are from Chesapeake and currently in the major leagues. That's when he became known as the fastest player in the country, and the nickname stuck. "It's incredible to think that I had a player that was nationally known," Lowery said. "All across the nation, people know who he is. For Mitchell, that's something he'll take with him for the rest of his life." The accomplishment was dramatic, considering five days earlier Shifflett could barely bend over to tie his shoes. That spring, Shifflett got a stress fracture in his back from lifting weights. So for the last two months of the season, he wore a back brace that wrapped around his torso, keeping his vertebrae straight. He didn't steal many bases that season, considering he had trouble standing after he slid. "There's no way I can play with this thing on," Shifflett remembered thinking. The team kept Shifflett's status on the down low, so Cosby's opponents couldn't get a leg up. Not that they could have done much -- Shifflett still hit .392 last year. "He never complained, he never whined," Lowery said. "A lot of kids wouldn't have even played with that thing on." Five days later, the back brace was off and Shifflett moved on to setting a national record. It was a quick turnaround, but doing something slowly just isn't his style.

Getting to know Mitchell Shifflett

School: Cosby

Year: Senior

Position: Outfield

If he could travel anywhere, it would be: Mikey Hanley's lake house at Lake Gaston, where he goes with his friends.

The skinny: Shifflett was named T-D player of the year after leading Cosby to the Central Region championship. He got red hot in the playoffs, batting .615 and scoring 14 runs in Cosby's final seven games. He stole 37 bases in 38 attempts. He was one of nine high school players nationwide selected by the American Baseball Coaches Association for the Rawlings Gold Glove Award. He will attend Virginia.

Forrest Lodge

School: Matoaca

Year: Senior

Position: First base

The skinny: Lodge hit in the middle of one of the best lineups in the state. He was named first-team all-district and all-region, hitting .466 with 13 RBI and 27 runs scored. Matoaca finished as Central-Region runner-up and lost in the state tournament to Western Branch.

Favorite food: Crab cakes

Austin Young

School: Atlee

Year: Senior

Position: First base

The skinny: Young, a first team all-district and all-region player, hit .471 with 18 RBI, a .606 on-base percentage and an .837 slugging percentage. He will play for Virginia as a relief pitcher.

Favorite food: Sushi

Nick Christopher

School: Dinwiddie

Year: Junior

Position: Second base

The skinny: An all-district and all-region selection, Christopher was a vital member of the Central District champion Generals on the mound and at the plate. He hit .422 with 19 RBI and 17 runs and a .514 on base percentage. On the mound he was 4-2 with a 1.58 ERA. He struck out 45 batters in 352/3 IP. He walked 14.

Favorite food: Steak (cooked medium)

Joey Cujas

School: Manchester

Year: Senior

Position: Third base

The skinny: One of the most lethal hitters in the region for the past three years, Cujas hit .471 with a region-best 13 homers. A repeat first-team All-Metro selection, he scored 30 runs and had 23 RBI. Cujas will compete at VCU next year.

Favorite food: Chipotle burrito

Nick Poulos

School:

Douglas Freeman

Year: Senior

Position: Shortstop

The skinny: The Colonial District player of the year, Poulos hit .487, leading Freeman to a district championship. An all-district and all-region pick, Poulos scored 25 runs and had 11 stolen bases. He struck out only four times. He will play at UR next year.

If he could travel anywhere in the world, he would choose: Brazil

Will Connerley

School: Lee-Davis

Year: Senior

Position: Catcher

The skinny: The Capital District player of the year and an all-region selection, Connerley hit .451, scored 28 runs and stole 11 bases. He had a fielding percentage of .986. He started classes at East Carolina last month and will play for the Pirates next spring.

If he had one wish, it would be: To make a difference in someone's life.

Chris King

School: Dinwiddie

Year: Senior

Position: Utility

The skinny: The Central District player of the year, King was first team all-region as a pitcher and second team as a shortstop. He hit .515 and had an OBP of .571. On the mound, he was 5-2 with a 1.18 ERA. He struck out 70 and walked 12 in 532/3 IP. He will play at Liberty next year.

The one possession he can't do without: "My cross and necklace." He wears it every day.

Austin Kilbourne

School: Matoaca

Year: Senior

Position: Outfield

The skinny: A repeat first team selection, Kilbourne hit cleanup in the mighty Matoaca lineup. He hit .433 with five homers, 20 RBI, 24 runs and nine stolen bases. He will play at Maryland next year.

Favorite food: Shrimp and crab legs

Kurt Fleming

School:

St. Christopher's

Year: Senior

Position: Outfield

The skinny: A VISAA all-state player the past two years, Fleming hit .382 with seven homers and a .708 slugging percentage. He had 33 RBI and 28 runs, helping St. Christopher's reach the state championship game. Fleming was drafted by the Braves in the 8th round of the MLB draft last month and reported to the Braves' spring training facility in Orlando just a few days later.

Favorite food: Chopped steak with gravy and onions

Campbell Henkel

School:

St. Christopher's

Year: Senior

Position: Pitcher

The skinny: Henkel was named VISAA state player of the year after going 9-1 with a 1.30 ERA. He had a perfect game against state champion Benedictine and a no-hitter against Liberty. He had 112 strikeouts and 17 walks in 642/3 IP. Opposing batters hit .156 against him. Henkel will play at VMI next year.

If he had one wish it would be: "To be in the starting rotation my first year at VMI."

Ryan Morrison

School: Manchester

Year: Senior

Position: Pitcher

The skinny: Morrison was named Dominion District and Central Region player of the year after going 9-1 with a 1.81 ERA. He had 82 strikeouts and 14 walks in 731/3 IP. Morrison will pitch at VCU next year.

Favorite food: El Paso chicken nachos

Zach Joseph

School: Benedictine

Year: Junior

Position: Pitcher

The skinny: Joseph was nearly unhittable at the close of the season, leading Benedictine to a state championship. In his last 31 1/3 IP, he was 4-1 with a 0.45 ERA, 40 strikeouts and a .165 opposing batting average. In the state playoffs, he beat Bishop O'Connell and St. Christopher's, allowing no runs and five hits in his final 13 innings pitched. He struck out 20 batters in that span.

Favorite food: "The Grill" (his parents' restaurant on Patterson Ave.)

Danny Mooney

School: Cosby

Year: Senior

Position: Pitcher

The skinny: Mooney was the ace of the Central Region champion Cosby Titans. He finished the season 11-2 with a 1.19 ERA. Mooney gave up only one earned run in his final six appearances. He will pitch at Davidson next year.

If he could travel anywhere in the world, he would choose: Hawaii

Bryan Bierlein

School: Matoaca

Year: Senior

Position: Pitcher

The skinny: Bierlein was supposed to be Matoaca's third-best pitcher this year. But when the two in front of him got hurt before the season, Bierlein seized the spotlight. He went 8-2 with a 0.96 ERA. He struck out 54 and walked 10 in 51 IP. Bierlein will play at CNU next year.

If he had one wish, it would be: "For a bajillion dollars."