



BCS good fit for Team Georgia

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FORT MYERS, Fla. – Team Georgia Baseball Academy, based in the north-Atlanta suburb of Alpharetta, Ga., began its sixth year of operation this spring, and founder and president Chris McRaney is putting six teams on the field this season.

One of those teams, known simply as Team Georgia, is here this week to compete in the Perfect Game 15u BCS Finals, which began Saturday morning and run through Thursday.

The organization has grown into a championship caliber program in five short years, not only in terms of winning tournament championships, but also in terms of cranking out top-notch prospects. Twelve members of Team Georgia's 2010 17u team signed NCAA Division I scholarships.

The players on Team Georgia's 15u team that are here are still a couple of years away from making their college choices, but they've started on the path that will ultimately lead to that day. Right now, as 15-years-olds, it's only matters that the players learn to play the game the right way.



L to R: Alex Bias, Anthony Carco, Jason Gifford, Clayton Vaught, Mitch Stallings, Patrick Stone, and Will Matthews.

That's the goal, anyway. Or as stated on TGBA's [website](#), "TGBA focuses on player development and providing our players the best opportunity possible to extend their playing careers beyond high school."

It starts with the younger players, and the 15-year-olds belong in that group.

Jim Butler has been coaching in the TGBA organization for three years but this is his first with the 15u team after coaching the same team of 16- and 17-year-olds



the past two seasons. He said dealing with the 15-year-olds is different from his experience coaching the 16- and 17-year-olds.

"They haven't been exposed to a high level of baseball like we're playing now, so there's a lot more teaching at 15 because everything we're trying to instruct is somewhat new to them," Butler said before his team's BCS Finals opener Saturday morning at Terry Park. "The 16s and 17s have been in the system for awhile, and they kind of get it and they know what to expect and they know what we expect."

There's a core group on the 15u Team Georgia team down here that played together a lot while they were growing up. Eleven of the 20 roster spots are filled with players from Alpharetta, and eight of those players attend Milton High School.

All of the roster spots are filled with players from the north Atlanta area.

"This is a fairly talented group," Butler said. "We have some guys who should be better as they grow older and should grow into real good players."

Butler spoke specifically of right-handers Patrick Stone and Will Matthews.

Stone threw Saturday – a 7-1 win over the Miami Mudcats – working six innings and giving up three hits and no earned runs while striking out four. Stone (6-2, 175-pounds) attends Greater Atlanta Christian High School.

"Patrick doesn't throw as hard as his body type but he has good movement on a lot of his pitches and he keeps the hitters off-balance," Butler said.

Matthews is a 6-2, 150-pounder and a member of the Milton High School contingent.

"Will has kind of anchored our staff this year, and the sky's the limit as far as his potential," Butler said.

Team Georgia scored its seven runs on just five hits against the Mudcats on Saturday. Adam Perleberg was 2-for-3 with two runs scored and Jason Gifford had an RBI double to highlight TG's offensive output.

With Team Georgia based in the north Atlanta suburbs, it shares common territory with the far-reaching East Cobb Baseball organization. That proximity also makes it convenient for TGBA to field teams in the many Perfect Game tournaments ECB hosts at the East Cobb Complex.



And it also makes for a mad scramble for competing organizations when it comes to securing the area's top talent. Fortunately for all involved, there's plenty to go around.

"There is a ton of talent in the area, and it seems like that there are certain classes that just go through waves of talent," Butler said. "I think this 15u class is one of those. This age group is just loaded. There are four really, really good (15u) teams out of East Cobb, then there's us, and Team Gwinnett and also Team Elite (15u Black) are real good

" And that's just on the north side of (Atlanta). That's not counting what's on the south side."

Team Georgia wasted little time in getting into the win column during the BCS Finals' first round of pool-play, which concludes for TG Sunday with games against the Excel Blue Rays and Knoxville Thunder 15u. A second round of three-game pool play is Monday and Tuesday with the playoffs starting Wednesday.

Butler doesn't have overblown expectations of his team, despite it being ranked 16th in Perfect Game's 15u travel team national rankings.

"We just want to come in and be able to compete," Butler said. "We would be disappointed if we didn't make the (16-team) playoffs, but realistically we just want to come in and compete because we know this is one of the best tournaments in the nation, and we know there are a lot of good teams down here.

"So ultimately what want to do is come in and compete, play our best and hopefully make the playoffs."