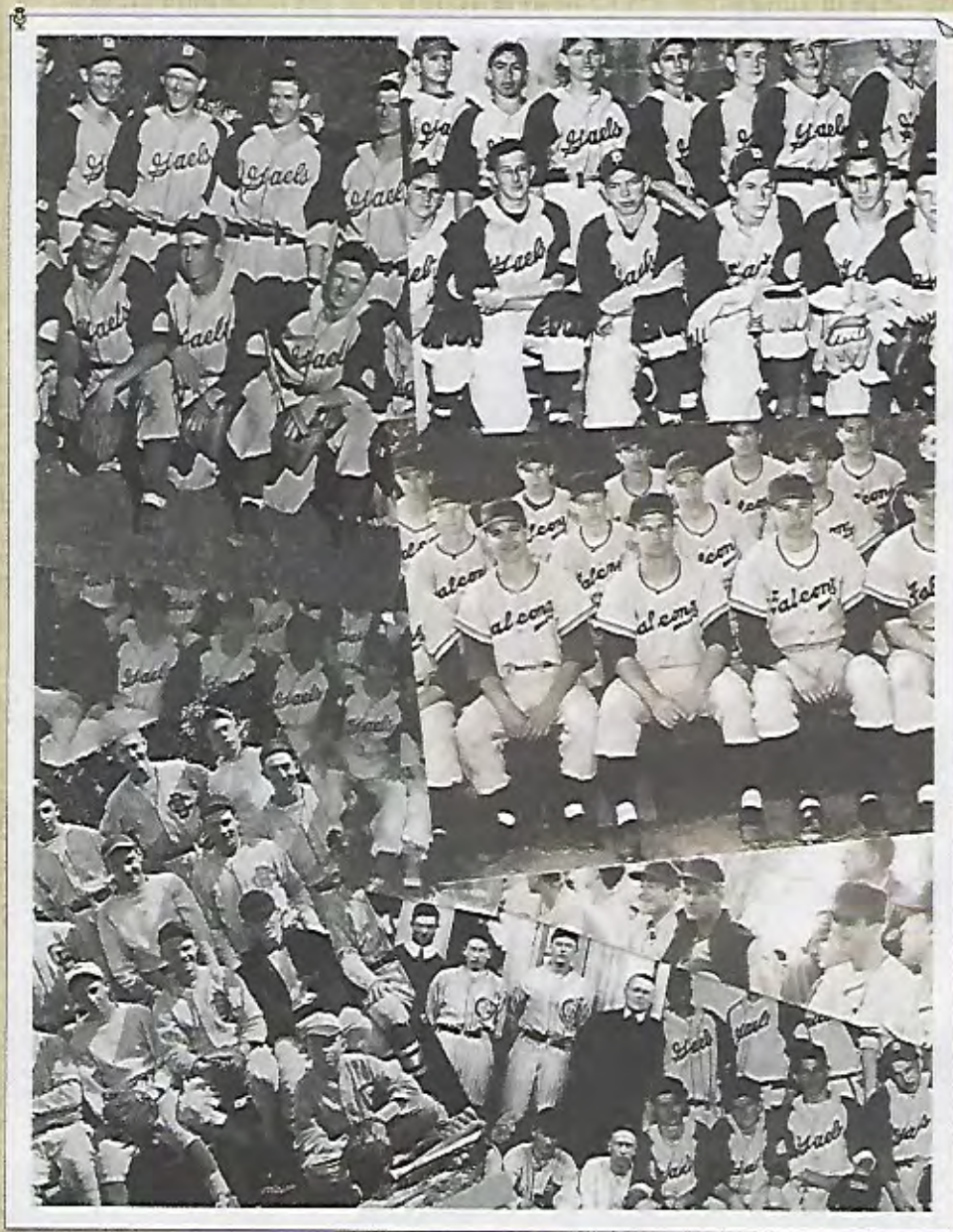


Christian  
Brothers

# Baseball History

1930 -  
1959



By

James McNamara, Class of 1947  
Joseph McNamara, Class of 1983

## Introductory Note

This is an attempt to chronicle the rich and colorful history of baseball played at Christian Brothers High School from the years 1930 to 1959. Much of the pertinent information for such an endeavor exists only in yearbooks or in scrapbooks from long ago. Baseball is a spring sport, and often yearbooks were published before the season's completion. There are even years where yearbooks were not produced at all, as is the case for the years 1930 to 1947.

Prep sports enjoyed widespread coverage in the local papers, especially during the hard years of the Great Depression and World War II. With the aid of old microfilm machines at the City Library, it was possible to resurrect some of those memorable games as told in the pages of the Sacramento Bee and Union newspapers.

But perhaps the best mode of research, certainly the most entertaining, is the actual testimony of the ballplayers themselves. Their recall of events from 50 plus years ago, even down to the most minor of details is simply astonishing.

Special thanks to Kathleen Davis, Terri Barbeau, Joe Franzoia, Gil Urbano, Vince Pisani, Billy Rico, Joe Sheehan, and Frank McNamara for opening up their scrapbooks and sharing photographs.

This document is by no means a complete or finished account. It is indeed a living document that requires additions, subtractions, and corrections to the ongoing narrative.

Respectfully submitted,

James McNamara, Class of 1947  
Joseph McNamara, Class of 1983

1930

As the 1920's came to a close, The Gaels of Christian Brothers High School had built a fine tradition of baseball excellence unmatched in the Sacramento area. The 1929 team finished with a perfect 10 and 0 record, culminating with a decisive victory over Sacramento High School, 5 to 2. Although the team would miss star center fielder Bud Hanna, and pitcher Joe Valine, new coach Joe Rooney had an impressive opening day lineup of:

C: Bud Soost  
1B: Tom Parodi  
2B: Bill Golsong  
SS: Bud Fitzgerald  
3B: Tom Prato  
LF: Tom Ceccettini  
CF: William Kaiser  
RF: Joe Marty  
P: Mark Separovich



The 1929 undefeated Christian Brother's Baseball Team

After winning several tune up games, including a spirited victory over a team of minor league all stars, the Gaels traveled upstate to take on College City High School in their home opener. Mark Separovich was brilliant, scattering six hits and yielding only two runs in a decisive 9 to 2 victory. Tom Parodi and Joe Marty were the hitting stars fueling a six run 8th inning rally.

### Besting Sacramento High School

The 1930 season featured a much anticipated three game showdown with Sacramento High School for the "mythical" city championship. In the first contest held on March 30<sup>th</sup>, the Sacramento Union referred to a "furiously fought contest" where Christian Brothers defeated Sacramento High School 7 to 6. Separovich struck out eight and recorded the victory, while Johnny Kaiser paced the offense with a 3 for 5 day:

Later that week, Sacramento High would even the series, setting up the deciding game on April 24<sup>th</sup>.

Saving his best stuff for the biggest game of the year, Separovich threw a four hit shutout as the Gaels clinched the three game series by a score of 3 to 0.

The Brothers scored all three of their runs in the ninth inning with a flurry of hits from the bats of Tom Prato, Henry Ceccettini, and the emerging star, Joe Marty.

### **A Strong Finish**

Following the solid victories over Sacramento High School, the Gaels tore through the second half of the schedule, defeating Esparto, Grass Valley, Auburn, and Wheatland twice in a home and away series.

Separovich continued his amazing year by striking out ten batters in the deciding game of the Wheatland series. Joe Marty and Johnny Kaiser continued to garner bottles of ink in the local papers for their batting acumen.



Mark Separovich was a dominant starting pitcher for the Gaels from 1929–1931.

As the schedule came to a close, The Gaels scheduled the powerful Sacramento City College Panthers for a showdown at Land Park's Diamond One. The "Jay See" was grooming for their conference championship game against San Mateo College. With names like Jiggs Traversi, Ernie Barber, and John Vukovich, the Panthers sported an imposing lineup. However behind the fine pitching of Mark Separovich and the timely hitting of Johnny Kaiser, the Gaels were able to secure a 4 to 3 victory in 11 innings.

On May 24<sup>th</sup>, 11 members of the team received their block letters at the Travelers Hotel. Bill Bowser was the toastmaster and Johnny Kaiser was selected as the honorary captain.

**Record: 12 and 2.**

## 1931

### A New Coach and High Expectations

New Coach Steve Porcella must have enjoyed his first day of spring practice. He had an outfield anchored by team captain Johnny Kaiser and hitting star Joe Marty. Basketball stars Gene Hughes and Bud Soost staffed the infield, while the sensational moundsmen, Mark Separovich, looked to continue his dominance over area batsmen. Coach Porcella was also blessed to have Tony Separovich, Mark's little brother, as a relief pitcher and spot starter.

Over the last two years, the Gaels had won twenty two of twenty four games, and Coach Porcella hoped to keep those winning traditions alive as he scheduled a difficult season opener on March 6<sup>th</sup> against the St. Marys College freshman nine in Moraga.

### Early setbacks then a mighty run

In what was called a "torrid battle" by the *Sacramento Union*, Christian Brothers lost their season opener to the St Mary's freshman by a score of 9 to 7.

Coach Porcella made a few lineup changes by placing Leroy Nevis at first base and Jack Casey at third, as the Gaels took on Roseville High. The changes paid off immediately as Brothers swamped

Roseville by a score of 13 to 2. Louie Jelecich started the game for Brothers and struck out the first eight men to face him, while Johnny Kaiser sparked the offense.

### Brothers In The Big Leagues

#### Joe Marty Class of 1931



Joe Marty, was a power hitting outfielder who helped Brothers win many memorable games in the early 1930's. Following graduation, he enrolled at St. Mary's College, continuing the play baseball, and catching the attention of the San Francisco Seals. Signed in 1934, it took him just two years to lead the Pacific Coast League in hitting, as he slugged his way to a .358 average. Marty soon became the property of the Chicago Cubs and hit 290 in his rookie year of 1938. Facing the powerful New York Yankees in the 1938 World Series, Marty was the hitting star of the Fall Classic, getting six hits and driving in 5 runs in games two and three. In what would be Lou Gehrig's last World Series, the Yankees swept the Cubs in four games.

Traded to the Phillies in 1939, Marty had two steady seasons in Philadelphia, hitting 270 in 1940, and 268 in his final big league season of 1941. The War brought Marty back to Sacramento where he served in the Air Force at Mather Field. Slowed by injuries sustained in an auto accident, and losing four years of his prime due to military service, Marty was released by the Phillies in 1946. Returning to his home town, Marty settled into a comfortable situation in Sacramento where he hit over 300 for five consecutive years with the Solons, finally retiring in 1952.

Although the famous bar he established at 15<sup>th</sup> and Broadway is no more, the iconic sign still stands. Joe Marty died in 1983.

Following the Roseville victory, Mark Separovich and Louie Jelecich shut out a powerful Marysville High team to the tune of 7 to 0. Alec Sweet and Johnny Kaiser supplied the offence by each collecting two singles and a double. After the game, the Marysville Knights of Columbus threw a banquet in honor of the Brothers, who were back to their winning ways.

### **Show Down with Sac High**

There was a tremendous press buildup for the "mythical" city championship between Sacramento High School and Christian Brothers. As the teams prepared to collide at Diamond One in Land Park, the *Sacramento Union* wrote:

**Sacramento High School annually outclasses the little Gael institution in basketball and football, but baseball finds the two schools even-Stephen and a whale of a battle is expected today.**

Later that month, behind the strong arm of Louie Jelecich, Brothers defeated the High School 6 to 1. Jelecich struck out 16 Dragons and Joe Marty slugged a two run homer as Christian Brothers, once again, won the "mythical" prep baseball championship.

### **Another Successful Season**

After victories over Esparta and Wheatland, the Gaels bested the Preston School of Industry, 10 to 3 behind the pitching of young Tony Separovich and the slugging of Johnny Kaiser. The team captain was five for six with a home run and a double.

Proving that they would play all competition, the Gaels traveled to Davis on April 9<sup>th</sup> to take on the California Aggie Nine. Rising to the occasion once again, the trio of Separovich, Marty, and Kaiser proved that Brothers had the best academic ball team in the Sacramento area. Separovich, the elder, scattered seven hits. Marty slammed two triples and Kaiser tallied four hits in five at bats, as the Gaels swamped the Aggies 11 to 6.



**Tony Separovich continued the family tradition of stellar pitching**

### **Record 10 and 2**

## 1932

The 1932 season opened up under a cloud of uncertainty. Graduation had thinned the ranks of the starting nine and the bad economy threatened to cut the season short. As Coach Porcellá plotted the Gaels schedule, the following editorial ran in the *Sacramento Union*:



Brother Ordan

*Year in and year out, we'd say Christian Brothers, the little school at 21<sup>st</sup> and Y Streets, has the edge on the much larger high school and junior college in turning out ballplayers who ultimately make the grade. Right now three former Gaels, Andy House, Joe Noonan, and Mark Separovich are with the Solons and are given good chances to stick.*

*The Brothers, however, are in a pickle this baseball season. The times, where have we heard them words before, have hit them and unless they can scrape up a little dinero they'll sink. You know that familiar situation.*

*Anyway, Brother Ordan of the Brothers Institution writes us that Coach Steve Porcellá's baseballers are going to play six home games this season and they have made up season passes which will admit he bearer to all games. They cost but 40 cents.*

*Brother Ordan tried desperately to play with our heart strings in telling of the situation pointing out how the Gaels this season ought to be given the chance to uphold the fine old Brothers baseball tradition; which extends back to the 90's and the school at 12<sup>th</sup> and K, but he didn't have to.*

*The Brothers record in the last four seasons, 43 wins in 49 starts speaks for it self. To see what the Gaels predict will be six more victories is worth 40 cents.*

### Sacramento High Game

After a few tune-up victories, the Gaels readied themselves for the annual showdown with Sacramento High School. For the last three years, Brothers has won the season series with Joe Marty and Mark Separovich doing the heavy work for them. However, as had been the case before, new stars stepped up and continued the dominance over the highly favored Dragon Nine. Leo Visintainer threw a complete game victory and Jack Casey was the hitting star as Brothers edged the high school 5 to 4.

According to the Sacramento Union:

**The Christian Brothers may not be able to do much with Sacramento High School in football, track, or basketball, but they can invariably turn out a better baseball team. The first game of the season between the nines of both schools was played yesterday, with the Brothers emerging victorious.**

Later that week, behind the fine pitching of Leo Visintainer, Brothers bested Sac High again for a clean sweep in 1932.

### **More Victories**

The following week Brothers travelled to Winters where they bested the country boys 4 to 1: Tony Separovich gave up just one run while Jack Casey and Leroy Nevis each slugged a homer.

Casey continued his torrid pace by going five for six as Separovich and Visintainer outlasted a powerful Woodland team 19 to 9. Alex Sweet also had a strong game, going four for five with a home run.

### **Taking On The College Boys**

Brothers closed out the year against college competition, squaring off first against the Panthers of Sacramento City College. In what would prove to be a dismal affair, the young Gaels were pounded by the older boys 10 to 1. The following week, the boys traveled to Moraga to tangle with the freshmen from St Mary's College. The contest resembled an alumni game with former Gael stars Joe Marty in the outfield and Jimmy Flynn on the mound, however Brothers would return to their winning ways with an impressive 5 to 2 victory.

**Record 10 and 1.**

## **1933**

An impressive group of letterman turned out for Coach Porcella's first spring practice. Over the past four seasons, Christian Brothers had compiled a 43 and 6 record, with most of the losses coming from college competition.



Powerful Jack Casey was a dominant catcher in the early 1930's.



### Hot of the Box

Emerging star hurler Jack Dark opened the 1933 season in high style by striking out fifteen batsman, and Al Scott had two key hits as Brothers beat Esparto 3 to 1. Two days later, Tony Separovich struck out 15 as the Gaels trounced Roseville 10 to 1. Later that week, the third strong arm in the Christian Brothers stable, Leo Visintainer scattered four hits, as the Gaels nipped the strong Grant High School Nine 5 to 4.

Visintainer was nearly perfect a week later when he came within two outs of a no hitter in another victory over Esparto. And in the final tune-up before the Sacramento High series, Dark two hit Woodland High School for their fifth consecutive victory.



Leo Visintainer hurled great ball for the Gaels in the mid 1930's.

### Owning the Dragons

Both squads went into the "mythical" city championship series with undefeated records, but Leo Visintainer hurled excellent ball, allowing only seven hits. Leroy Nevis was three for four and the Gaels rallied to beat the Dragons 8 to 3. Later in the month, Jack Dark threw a four hit shutout and struck out thirteen as Brothers took the annual series for the fourth straight year.

### An Old Friend at St. Marys

After an impressive come from behind victory over Woodland, Brothers traveled to Moraga for a tussle with the St. Mary's freshman nine. Bud Hanna, a former Christian Brothers athletic star, put the hurt on his old mates by pounding out three hits. Leo Visintainer pitched admirably, but was handicapped by seven CB errors. When the dust settled, Brothers had lost their first game of the season, 7 to 1.

However, one week later, Brothers avenged the loss in a thrilling 9 to 8 victory. Leroy Nevis and Gene Sullivan each had three hits and Tony Separovich scored the winning run in the ninth.

## Rounding Out a Great Year

In their last prep game of the year, Brothers trounced the Clarksburg nine 16 to 7. Jack Dark continued his mound mastery with 16 strike outs and for good measure slugged a home run.

The Gaels returned to college competition for their final contest of the year when they were shut out by the Panthers of Sacramento City College 4 to 0. It was the first shut out pitched against Brothers in

over five years. The defeat was softened by the prospects of enjoying a friendly game against a team of alumni all stars later that week. The alumni squad was staffed with standout players from the old 12<sup>th</sup> and K Street school. They included:

P: Jack O'Neill  
C: Francis Rooney  
1B: Howard Sullivan  
2B: Jim Lane  
3B: Vincent Horton  
SS: George Silver  
OF: Bill Keneally  
OF: Joe Lyons  
OF: Jim Rooney

**Record: 9 and 2**

## 1934

As spring practice opened for new coach Joe Gideon, thirty two prospects turned out carry on a tradition of great baseball for the small catholic high school. Much of the success was attributed to the graduating class of 1933, those hard to replace ballplayers of Leroy Nevis, Al Scott, Alex Sweet, Tom Sugar, Tony Separovich, and Frank Russell. Early season injuries to returning stars Leo Visintianer and Jack Dark further complicated Coach Gideon's 1934 roster.



The 1933 Christian Brothers High School Baseball Team had a 9 and 2 record, and beat Sac High for the City Championship

The fledgling squad, led by young hurler Charley Doyle, stunned Sacramento Jr. College to win the first game of the season 4 to 3, setting up the annual showdown with Sacramento High School. On the eve of big game, The *Sacramento Union* reported:

*"Not since Larry Gillick, now a pitcher for the Senators and Joe Noonan, on the Solon staff last year, hooked up in some great duels in 1928, with Gillick coming out on top, have the Dragons won a series from the Brothers. But this year, with a veteran team, the high school is favored."*

### The Sac High Series

The Gaels dropped the first game of the series to Sacramento High School 6 to 3. Leo Visintianer pitched well but the Dragons made their hits count. A week later in front of over 1,000 spectators at McClatchy, the Dragons won again, 4 to 1. Back from injury, Jack Dark pitched well but Sac High's Lawrence Bertolani struck out 17 Gael batsmen. Shortly thereafter, Brother Ordan took over the squad as coach.

### A Hot Team

A new revamped line up of  
Pete Ruzler CF  
Leo Herberger 1B  
Allen Merkley 3B  
Gene Sullivan SS  
Fred Kienlie LF  
Bill Regan 2B  
Bill Silva RF  
Dino Beltrami C

won impressively over Jackson High, East Nicolaus, and Roseville setting up a big game with a powerful Woodland squad.

Backed by the strong pitching of Jack Dark and Brother Ordan's aggressive game management, Brothers beat the favored Woodland Nine 4 to 1.

### Brothers In The Big Leagues

**Charlie Schanz**  
Class of 1937

Charlie Schanz was a hard throwing right handed pitcher for the strong Christian Brothers teams in the mid to late thirties.



Standing six foot three, Schanz was an imposing presence on the mound. He made the big leagues in 1944 at the age of 24 with the Philadelphia Phillies. His best season was his rookie year in which he compiled a 13 and 16 record with a 3.32 era for the last place Phillies. He would pitch for a total of five years in the majors (four with Philadelphia and 1 with the Boston Red Sox). Later in his career, Schanz became a relief pitcher and was for three years in the top ten for most saves.

Schanz finished his baseball career in Sacramento, pitching for his hometown Solons from 1953 to 1954, winning 12 against 18 defeats. In retirement Charlie Schanz coached youth baseball in East Sacramento.

Four bunts in a row in the sixth inning won the game for the Gaels and gave them momentum going into their final showdown with the undefeated Sacramento High Dragons.

### **Rounding out a Great Year**

Overcoming a five run lead in the fifth inning, Brothers upset the Dragons with a vengeance by a final score of 12 to 7. Merkley was the last pitcher for the Brothers hurling four scoreless innings to seal the victory. The Gaels rounded out the year with impressive victories over St Mary's Freshman Nine and the rematch against Sacramento City College. The 1934 season closed out an impressive chapter in local Sacramento baseball lore. Over the last four years, Brothers had compiled a record of 69 victories against only 11 defeats.

**Record: 7 and 3**

## **1935**

The 1935 began with a sense of sadness for Coach Brother Ordan and his team, as former captain Leroy Nevis died in early March. The boys dedicated the first game of the season to his memory and went out and defeated a strong Woodland team 6 to 1, behind the three hit pitching of Allan Merkley.

### **Bad Weather Followed By Victories**

A very wet March washed out most of the early schedule for the team, and after a disappointing loss to Roseville 3 to 2, where Gaels pitcher Fred Kienlie pitched three hit ball, Brothers went on a hot streak. They destroyed a strong Woodland team 8 to 0, behind Kienlie's one hit shoutout. A few days later they defeated Folsom High School 6 to 1, and rounded out the successful week by getting revenge on Roseville High 5 to 1. The Gael offense was paced by Norman Silva, Deno Beltrami, Joe Quintana, and Pete Huizer.

### **A Dragon Rout**

The mythical city championship brought nearly 1,000 spectators to McClatchy Park. For over a decade, the games between the two Sacramento prep schools had been closely played contests, with Brothers generally getting the upper hand. However, 1935 brought about a rout as the powerful Sacramento High School Nine turned on the heat and walloped Christian Brothers 16 to 2. The loss ended a melancholy season, blighted by bad weather and the untimely loss of former team captain Leroy Nevis.

**Record 6 and 4**

## 1936

Coach Jimmy Flynn had only catcher Gino Beltrami and pitcher Allan Merklely returning as regulars for his 1936 campaign. As the team opened the season against Roseville, Coach Flynn shared his opening day lineup:

Gino Beltrami C  
Allan Merleky P  
Ted Garderer 1B  
Frank Silva 2B  
Ned Sheehan SS  
Frank Lema 3B  
Bobby Williams LF  
Larry Senna CF  
Jack Ball RF



Charlie Schanz

Behind the five hit pitching of Alan Merklely, Brothers won its first game of the year, defeating Roseville High 10 to 2. Merklely struck out ten and young sluggers Ned Sheehan and Frank Silva paced the offence with three hits apiece.

After winning several tune up games, including one over Bill Avila's legion all stars, Brothers lost to Marysville High School 9 to 1. With a four and one record, the Gaels took on a strong City College team in what was billed in the local papers as a great pitching match-up in Land Park.

Down 2 to 0 in the final inning, Ned Sheehan, Brother's 15 year old shortstop, tripled to begin a rally, but was eventually stranded. Alan Merklely hurled great ball for the Gaels, but was saddled with the 2 to 0 defeat.

Following the City College game, Coach Flynn's boys went on a hot streak, winning an avenging contest over Marysville, 3 to 0. Merklely slugged two triples and Charlie Schanz hurled a four hit shutout. Timely hitting and shutdown pitching continued for the Gaels as they bested East Nicolaus 8 to 2, and Roseville 3 to 2. Schanz and Merklely continued to star on the mound and at the plate, as the schedule turned towards the anticipated matchup with Sacramento High School.

### **A Streak of Bad Luck**

The Gaels played two rather disappointing games leading up to the Inner City showdown.

Both games were close contests with CB errors in the field being the difference. On the eve of the mythical city championship game, the Brothers Nine traveled to Moraga and defeated the St. Mary's freshman behind the strong pitching of Alan Merkley and the clutch hitting of Ned Sheehan and Jim McPartland.

### Sacramento Showdown

Christian Brothers pounded Sac High starter Stanley Klebs for five runs in the first three innings and led 5 to 0 going into the third. However, the Dragons came roaring back and stunned the Gaels with a 15 to 5 throbbing.

Two weeks later, Brothers gained their revenge by besting the high school 6 to 5 in an exciting affair. The *Sacramento Union* wrote:

*Going into the last half of the ninth inning two runs behind, Coach Jimmy Flynn's lads scored three runs after the first the first two men were retired to win the ballgame. After Shanz and Silva were retired, Babe Pinaglia walked and Fred Lema singled him to third, whereupon Ned Sheehan, the shining light for the Brothers' attack, doubled to left, to tie the game. He scored the winning run when Art Quadros, the Sac High Backstop, threw wild to third. Sheehan drove on five runs for the Gaels.*

### Record: 7 and 4

1937

Former standout outfielder from the class of 1929, Bud Hanna took over the coaching duties in 1937, and he inherited a team rich in potential. Paul Knezovich joined Charlie Schanz as a powerful one two pitching punch, while Ned Sheehan, Ted Gardner, Babe Pinaglia, Pete Archerda, and young Wally Westlake looked to make some noise with the lumber.



Athletic standout Bud Hanna returned to Brothers as a coach in 1937

Brothers looked good in their first couple of tune up games, but the real competition awaited on April 8<sup>th</sup>, when Brothers would square off against their arch rivals of Sacramento High.

The Dragons got to the young Paul Knezovich early with 7 runs in the first two innings as they pounded out an 8 to 3 victory. Although losing to Sac High was always tough, there were some positives in defeat. Ted Gardener had three hits, and Wally Westlake made several outstanding plays in the field.

## Hitting Their Stride

Brothers showed considerable pluck by righting the ship in Roseville with a 10 to 7 victory, Charlie Schanz was the winning pitcher, striking out 13 Roseville batters. Ted Gardener and Babe Pinaglia led the Gael hitting barrage. A week later Joe Vaca made his pitching debut for Brothers and he was victorious over San Juan High School 10 to 4. Pete Archerda hit a grand slam home run and Ned Sheehan was 3 for 3.

Paul Knezovich returned to the mound on May 3<sup>rd</sup> and was a brilliant in a 15 to 2 shellacking of Roseville High. Giving up only three hits and striking out nine, Knezovich was close to unhittable, as two of the hits he gave up were of the scratch variety. Bob Neeley and Ted Gardener had two hits apiece, while Ned Sheehan hit a home run..

Sheehan's overall play was beginning to get media attention, as in the May 15<sup>th</sup> victory over Grant, where, according to the Sacramento Union, he made some plays at shortstop that would have done credit to any Coast Leaguer.

Brothers closed out the year with a thrilling victory over Elk Grove High. Once again Sheehan was the defensive star, as the *Sacramento Union* reported:

*A sensational backhand catch of a hot grounder through third by Ned Sheehan nipped an Elk Grove rally and gave the Brothers nine a 7 to 6 win over the country school at Elk Grove yesterday. Two Elk Grove men were on in the last of the ninth when Sheehan robbed the batter of a sure hit with his brilliant catch and throw to first.*

Paul Knezovich would get the victory, as Brothers concluded another satisfying season.

**7 and 2 record**

## The Mythical City Championship

Christian Brothers won or tied the mythical city championship over Sac High or McClatchy:

1930

1931

1932

1933

1936

1938

1943

1945

1946

1947

1948

1949

## 1938

Coach Bud Hanna could do nothing but pray, as rain washed out the first quarter of his season. Finally on March 27<sup>th</sup>, the lads opened their season against Marysville High and fell in disappointing fashion 7 to 1. One bright spot for the Brothers squad was the emergence of pitcher Paul Knezovich who shut down the Marysville attack in relief.

### A Strong Team

Knezovich would be nearly perfect three days later when he hurled no hit ball for eight innings, before settling for a two hit shutout over Grant Union High School. Ned Sheehan was three for four with a triple to supply the offense.

Russell Knight, the powerful catcher for the Gaels, starred the following week when Brothers defeated a brand new McClatchy High School 4 to 2. Knight had three hits and a triple, while Joe Vacca pitched impressively for the victory. Revenge was on the Gaels mind as they traveled to Marysville for a return engagement. Behind the strong hitting of Pete Archerda, Wally Westlake, and Ned Sheehan, Joe Vacca was able to pitch the team to a tight 6 to 5 victory.

McClatchy fell to Brothers again a week later 6 to 5, and East Nicolaus was totally outclassed by the Gaels a few days later 11 to 4. Ned Sheehan continued his torrid hitting with a three hit game including two triples.

### The Sacramento High Series

Christian Brothers had quite a head of steam leading into the mythical city championship against the high school. Perhaps due to a bit of hubris, the boys played their worst game of the year, falling to their rivals 12 to 4. The Gaels brought their iron mitts with them in making seven errors.

## Brothers in the Big Leagues



### Wally Westlake Class of 1939

Wally Westlake blossomed into a slugger his senior year at Christian Brothers.

After graduation he quickly climbed the minor league ladder, and joined the Oakland Oaks of the Pacific Coast League in 1942. After three years in the military, Wally rejoined the Oaks, managed by Casey Stengel, and hit 315 in 1946. Signed by the Pittsburg Pirates, he made his major league debut in 1947 and hit 273 with 17 home runs. He would go on to have a 10 year major league career.

Westlake's best year was 1949, when he had 23 home runs and 104 RBI's for the Pirates, where he shared the outfield with Hall of Famer Ralph Kiner. In 1951 he made the All Star team, but was traded later in the year to St. Louis Cardinals. His career resurged in Cleveland and he was a part of the World Series team in 1954 that won 111 games. Lifetime, he hit 272 and slugged 127 home runs.

In 1956 Wally returned to Sacramento and played his final year in professional baseball with the Solons, hitting twelve home runs and driving in 50 runs.



Regrouping a week later, the boys unleashed an avalanche of base hits coupled with shutout pitching from Paul Knezovich as they trounced the Dragons 16 to 0. Larry Manuian hit for the cycle for Brothers and was indeed the batting star.

### **A Successful Season**

As the season came to a close, Brothers trounced the Lions of McClatchy for the third time, 8 to 3. Russ Knight and Ned Sheehan were the hitting stars again, and Paul Knezovich continued his mound mastery as he scattered three hits and fanned six. Woodland High fell to the Gaels a week later 3 to 1, and Bud Hanna's boys finished a stellar year by besting the older boys of City College 4 to 3.

At the end of the year banquet, Ned Sheehan was selected captain for the 1939 season. Sheehan was a shortstop in seasons past, but Coach Hanna moved him to third base early in the 1938 season.

**Record: 10 and 2**

## **1939**

Coach Bud Hanna was certainly going to miss first baseman Ted Ravellete, third baseman Ned Sheehan, outfielder Louis Marracci, and pitcher Joe Vacca — all lost to graduation. However, a strong squad remained, anchored by pitching star Paul Knezovich, catcher Russell Knight, and sluggers Wally Westlake, Pete Archerda, and Larry Manuian.

### **New Arms**

Brothers began the year with a tight victory over the Woodland Wolves 3 to 2. Newcomer Jerry Aiello allowed only six hits and was the winning pitcher. Pete Archerda collected three hits and scored the winning run in the ninth inning.

Later that week, another new moundsman, Joe Valine, made his debut and allowed only five hits and notched his first victory 8 to 3. Russ Knight was the hitting star getting three hits and the RBI's. Wally Westlake and Bill Rico played well in the field for Brothers, making several key defensive stops.



**Wally Westlake was one of the finest hitters to ever play for Christian Brothers**

The Gaels continued their hot start with a decisive victory over East Nicolaus High 10 to 1. Jerry Aiello allowed only five hits, while Wally Westlake, Tony Radman, and Bob Smith each hit triples for the slugging Gaels.

### **The Big Games**

Joe Valine returned to the mound for CB as they squared off against the Dragons of Sacramento High. The Gaels' bats were alive early, led by Wally Westlake and Russ Knight, but they could not overcome a strong Sacramento attack. In a very tight game, Brothers lost to their arch rivals 8 to 5.

Later that month, Brothers fought the McClatchy Lions to a thrilling 7 to 7 tie. Paul Knezovich and Joe Valine kept the Gaels in the game and Wally Westlake supplied the offense with three of the seven team's hits.

### **Fabulous Pitching**

As the CB nine marched through the remainder of the 1939 season, pitching and timely hitting would continue to fuel their victory accumulation. On April 19<sup>th</sup> Joe Valine and Jerry Aiello held a strong hitting Grant Union team to just one hit. Pete Archerda and Russ Knight were both three for four as Brothers bested the Pacers 11 to 4.

A week later, in a mighty display of pitching and slugging, Brothers destroyed San Juan High School 10 to 0 at William Land Park, as Jerry Aiello authored the 5 hit shutout.



The 1939 Christian Brothers Ball Team was 15 and 2.

In their final game of the season against Sacramento City College, the Gaels upset the college boys once again by a score of 4 to 3. Paul Knezovich was the winning pitcher.

The Brothers had to come from behind in the eighth inning, paced by Pete

Archerda, and Mike Puliz. Charles Roddy made several stops at the hot corner to seal the victory in the ninth inning.

**Record: 15 and 2**

## 1940

Bud Hanna returned in 1940 for his third year as baseball coach. Graduation took its annual allotment of star players including Wally Westlake, Pete Archerda, Paul Knezovich, and Russell Knight.

### **Bad Weather Again**

Heavy showers throughout the first part of the schedule kept the team idle, and it wasn't until March 23 that the team was able to play their first game against the Chinn Beretta managed Dante Club Nine. The Gaels dropped the friendly 3 to 2.

Persistent rain would wash away more of the schedule in late March. However, the clouds parted long enough on April 3 for the Gaels to manhandle Folsom High School 11 to 2. New pitchers John DeStazio and Howard McKenzie joined Joe Valine in setting down the Folsom Nine in what would be one of the few victories of a wet and disappointing season.

As Brothers prepared to face McClatchy, the local papers noted that the Lions were favored due to having played more games. Indeed, the scribes were correct as McClatchy throttled the pitching trio of Joe Valine, John De Stazio, and Harold McKenzie, 15 to 2. After the game, proving he still had lead in his willow, Bud Hanna signed with the Yuba City Bears of the Valley League, although he would continue his coaching duties with Brothers.

### **A Sac High Squib Of A Series**

In their first encounter with Sacramento High School, Brothers blew a 5 run lead and lost to the Dragons 8 to 5. Mike Puliz played well for CB with three hits.

The news got worse a week later as the high school dominated Brothers 15 to 1. The winning Dragons collected only 7 hits, but the Brothers' pitchers issued fourteen walks and eight errors were made in the field.

## Limping Home

On April 21 the Gaels traveled to Moraga for a skirmish with the freshman St. Mary's squad. DeStazio pitched well but the Gael bats were quiet in a 5 to 1 defeat.

Later that week, in what would have been a highlight to a dismal season, Brothers fell to McClatchy 4 to 2. Wally O'Keefe had a big day at the plate with a couple of hits including a triple. Joe Valine and battery mate Joe Borich kept the Lion bats in check until a late inning rally iced the game for McClatchy.

The season closed out against the Sac City team with a 12 to 3 defeat.

**Record: 5 and 9**

## 1941

John Gianonni took over the coaching duties for Brothers in 1940. Coach Gianonni was also the football coach, and even played a season in the NFL for the Cleveland Rams in 1938.

As the 1940 season began Brothers was replete with talented players including pitchers John De Stacio, Joe Valine and the Knezovich brothers Al and Ray. Standout batters included Bill Rico, Ernie Bertolani, Bob Rehm, Bob Barbeau, and John Hoppe.

### Early Sac High Loss

Coach Gianonni and his Gael Nine opened their season against their arch nemesis Sac High on March 12 and the duo of Valine and Knezovich had no answers for the potent Dragon bats, as Brothers lost their opener 15 to 0.

Three days later Ray Knezovich made up for his sketchy first start, by holding El Dorado High to only 2 runs, and the Gael bats came alive, tallying 13 runs.

Later that week, the Gaels headed south to the cow town of Elk Grove and behind the slugging of Billy Rico, George Miskilin and Bob Rehm, they defeated the Herd



Billy Rico was a star third baseman and an All City Selection in 1941

8 to 7. Ray Knezovich continued his strong pitching the next day against Marysville, giving up only three hits and two runs as Brothers walloped the boys from the north 13 to 2. Offensive standouts included Louie Fatur, Buster Habecker, George Miskilin, and Billy Rico.

After the stinging defeat early in the season to Sac High, Brothers had won three clean victories and had some momentum going into the big game against McClatchy. An impressive pitching matchup of Wally Turpen versus Ray Knezovich was scheduled for March 29 at William Land Park. Turpen proved why he would later be selected to the All City Team, by outdueling Knezovich in a tight game, 2 to 1.

### **A Mediocre Ending**

Brothers got back to their winning ways with a victory over Woodland 2 to 0, but then dropped a disappointing game to El Dorado High, while committing seven errors, 6 to 5. The following week Billy Rico and Ernie Bertolotti would explode for four hits each and Joe Valine would hurl a shutout as Brothers whipped Winters High School 15 to 0.

In their return matchup with McClatchy, Brothers was unable to get past Wally Turpen as Ray Knezovich was the hard luck loser again 5 to 2. Buster Habacker had two hits including a triple in the losing effort.

After losing to the college boys of SCC 6 to 2, Brothers closed out the year losing to the Woodland Wolves 5 to 4. George Miskilin had another fine day with the bat, going 3 for 4.

At the close of the 1941 season, the local high school coaches picked an all city baseball team for the Sacramento Union. Third Baseman Billy Rico and Outfielder George Miskilin were selected from the Brothers Squad.

**Record: 9 and 8**

## **1942**

With America at war and many schools cutting back their ball programs, Brothers looked to play a shorter 13 game schedule in 1942. Coach John Giannoni was back for his second year, and he looked to improve on what had been two consecutive mediocre seasons.

## An Abundance

On the eve of the 1942 season, the *Sacramento Union* recognized that this year's Brothers squad had a major advantage over the rest of the league:

If an abundance of pitchers is any means of gauging the success of a baseball team, the Christian Brothers aggregation appears headed for a winning season. Coach John Giannoni who is putting some 35 charges through their paces every afternoon at Southside Park is building his team around four returning lettermen. Joe Valine, last year's leader, is back as top pitcher. He will be spelled by Al Knezovich, another excellent chucker. Two "rookies" crowding the regulars are Bob Barbeau and Earl Perry. Barbeau already has a no-hit, no-run game to his credit in summer league.



Bob Barbeau was a pitching and hitting star for CB in the early 40's.

Before the season opener versus Elk Grove, Coach Giannoni outlined his starting lineup for the 1942 campaign:

C Don McKenzie  
1B Bob Rehm  
2B Jack Ryan  
3B Frank Raton  
SS Fee Anderson  
LF Jim Keller  
CF Buster Habecker  
RF Jack Hoppe/Ray Hackett

In their season opener the Christian Brothers baseball squad trounced the Elk Grove Herd 5 to 0. Perry, Barbeau, and Knezovich all pitched for Brothers, holding the Herd to just two hits. Bob Rehm had two base hits and Joe Valine hit a triple for the offense.

## Disappointing Big Game Outcomes

Brothers would notch victories over Galt High School and San Juan in preparation for the showdown with the other city schools. Knezovich and Valine both pitched well in the wins, with Jack Ryan and Don McKenzie providing the offense. In the first big game of the year Sac High defeated Brothers in a wild hitting contest 10 to 5. Don McKenzie had several hits including a triple.

A week later, Joe Valine took to the mound against McClatchy, and although he would have several hits, including a triple, his pitching counterpart was too strong that day. Bill Hampton struck out 16 Gaels as he easily cruised to a 6 to 0 victory.

After wins over Elk Grove, Marysville, and Sacramento City College, where Al Knezovich pitched superbly, Brothers looked at one more chance to slow down a surging McClatchy team. Bob Barbeau pitched well, but once again Bill Hampton was strong striking out 10 Gaels, as the Lions cruised to an easy 8 to 3 victory. Jim Keller had a solid game-offensively for Brothers with three hits.



Al Knezovich was an All City Selection in 1942.

With the season over, once again the area coaches picked their all city team with pitcher Al Knezovich and Left Fielder/Pitcher Joe Valine getting the coveted selections.

**Record: 8 and 3**

## 1943

With a staff anchored by All City selection Al Knezovich, Brother Patrick looked forward to improving on what was a disappointing 1942 season. With a nice blend of upper and lower classmen, Brothers trotted out an opening day lineup of:

C: Don McKenzie

P: Al Knezovich

1B: Gil Urbano

2B: Bob Barbeau

SS: Clyde Haskell

3B: Frank Rationi

LF: John Boroja

CF: A. Stambuck

RF: Bob Rehm

### Early Setbacks

Brothers opened the season against the McClatchy Lions and although Knezovich pitched admirably, his fielders had a tough time with the leather, committing 6 errors. In the fifth inning, McClatchy scored 4 unearned runs.

The final score was McClatchy 5, Brothers 4. Knezovich was also the Gaels' batting star garnering 3 hits, including a triple. A week later Brothers would drop a tough game to the Sac High Dragons, as they limped out of the first week of the season with an 0 and 2 record.

Many writers, including Bill Avila in his "Behold the Bushers" column in the *Sacramento Union* anointed the Gaels as the team to beat in 1943. Perhaps stung by the early season defeats, Brother Patrick made a few changes by ushering his hard throwing second baseman Bob Barbeau to the mound, giving Knezovich a few days rest. The Gaels also welcomed to the team star hoop player Buster Habecker, and gave their young catcher Ronnie King a few starts behind the plate.

### Back With A Vengeance

A recharged Brothers squad returned to action on April 7, and the Dragons of Sacramento High were the unfortunate victims. Slamming out 11 hits, the Gaels soundly defeated the high school. Knezovich gave up only one hit in his first victory of the year, and Bob Barbeau and Tony Stambuck had three hits to pace the offense.

A week later Brothers once again handled the Dragons with a 9 to 4 victory. Bob Barbeau was the pitching star that day giving up only 4 hits. Al Knezovich, trading the mound for right field, had three hits to go along with two doubles from Gil Urbano.

On the eve of the big game against McClatchy, there was tremendous hype in the local papers, with the scribes predicting the game of the year, and over 500 people paid witness to indeed that. The *Sacramento Union* reported:

In a contest which will go down in local records as one of the hardest fought diamond tilts of all time, CB defeated McClatchy 2 to 1 in a 12 inning battle at Cardinal Field yesterday for the 1943 City Championship.

It was a give and take duel all the way between two classy prep moundsmen Al Knezovich and George Vernatchi. The winning run came on a squeeze play by Frank Ratoni, and Gil Urbano scored the winning run. Buster Habecker was the hitting star with 2 hits including a rousing double off the center field wall.



Frank Ratoni's squeeze bunt won the 1943 City Championship



Later that week, the team was feted at a banquet/rally at Christian Brothers, and Bob Barbeau was named the honorary captain of the City Champion Gael squad.



The 1943 Christian Brothers team had a 9 and 2 record, and defeated McClatchy 2 to 1 in a memorable city championship game at Cardinal Field.

## 1944

A whopping 75 eager ball players turned out for the first day of spring practice. Brother Henry and Brother Gregory, sharing the coaching duties, could look to a club rich in leadership, including 10 veterans from the 1943 championship team. As spring practice came to a close, the strong starting nine were:

3B: Gil Urbano  
2B: Daryl Cook  
SS: Clyde Haskell  
1B: Louis Sambocetti  
LF: John Boroja  
CF: Anthony Stanbuk  
RF: Bob Rehm  
C: Danny Corcoran  
P: Al Knezovich

The season began on March 25 in Folsom and the Gaels jumped out to quick 4 to 0 lead behind the batting acumen of Clyde Haskell and Gil Urbano. As the game wore on, Brothers jumped to a 7 to 4 lead only to falter in the ninth inning and lose 8 to 7. Credible in defeat, Knezovich pitched the entire game, and Urbano and Haskell each tallied three hits.

Knezovich's opening night jitters were long gone three days later when Brothers

squared off against McClatchy. In the third inning, he gave up a single to Lion batsman Gus Stathos, and it would be the only hit the Freeport Blvd Institution would tally all day. To balance out a great all around outing, Knezovich had three hits to go along with a 5 to 1 victory over McClatchy.

Two days later, the Dragons of Sacramento High School fell victim to the crafty moundsman, as he shut them out on just two hits. Tony Stambuk paced the Gael offense with two hits, and the papers referred to the winning pitcher as Al "Cream of the Local Prep Pitchers" Knezovich.

However in the return match a week later, the Dragons would finally get to Knezovich and rough him up for 8 runs. Although Clyde Haskell and Bob Rehm had two hits apiece, Brothers could not keep pace with the High School and lost by a final score of 8 to 4. With the series even at one game apiece, all eyes looked forward to the third and deciding game between the two ball powers at Edmonds Field later in the month.

Although Brothers would drop close games to Folsom and Elk Grove, they continued to play good ball, especially against their other home town rivals, the McClatchy Lions.

In the second game of a three game series, Knezovich would allow only three hits in a 3 to 1 victory. The Lions made it interesting in the ninth by loading the bases, but Al would fan the final two batters to seal the win. In the third and final game against McClatchy, Clyde Haskell would have three hits to pace the Gael attack as Knezovich beat the Lions for the third consecutive time, 10 to 4.



Shortstop Clyde Haskell was a three year varsity player who signed a pro contract his senior year.

### The Big Game

On the eve of the big game with Sacramento High School, The Union featured a picture of the Christian Brothers High School Baseball Team on the front page of the Sports Section, calling them "The Titans of Prep Baseball".

There was tremendous hype and the game was to be played at Edmonds Field with Al Knezovich squaring off against rival hurler Dave Smith.

However, in what would be a sea-saw battle till the very last frame, the Dragons were victorious 8 to 5.

Brothers took a one run lead in the fourth inning on singles by Knezovich and Urbano. They added their last tally in the fifth after Clyde Haskell singled and advanced to third on an error by the Sac High third baseman on Bob Rehm's bunt. Haskell was thrown out at home plate on an attempted squeeze play, but Rehm advanced to third and scored on another Sac High error. However, Sac High came back in the sixth to score four times to win the game.

### A Nice Finish

In the final game of the year, Brothers defeated Woodland 7 to 0. Knezovich was superb in a three hit shutout, and Gil Urbano had three hits including two doubles. Later that day, letters were presented to 34 baseball players from the varsity and junior varsity teams by Manager Earl Sheely of the Sacramento Solons. Named honorary co-captains of the varsity team were the two departing seniors, Al Knezovich and Bob Rehm.

**Record: 8 and 4**

### 1945

As the 1945 season opened, Christian Brothers welcomed back Brother Bertram, the former Director of Athletics, who had been away at St. Mary's doing post graduate work. Brother Gregory resumed the coaching duties and behind veterans Gil Urbano, Clyde Haskell, and Ronnie King, he looked forward to a season of spirited offense.



Star Players of the 1945 team

Back row: Mel Knezovich, Clyde Haskell, John Latino  
Kneeling: Matt Puliz, Lou Samboceti, Ronnie King

Adding to the rich history of Gael pitching acumen, hurlers Johnny Latino, Matt Puliz, and Mel Knezovich showed tremendous promise.

## Historical Pitching Displays

In the opening game of the 1945 season, Johnny Latino threw a no hitter against San Juan, winning 16 to 0. Leading the 14 hit attack was Ronnie King who was 3 for 4 with two doubles. Latino's gem was saved by a remarkable defensive play by infielder Charles Herrera who ranged deep behind second base to preserve the no hitter.

The following week against Elk Grove, Latino pitched again, but fell behind 4 to nothing in the second inning. Sparked by a bases loaded Cliff Haskell triple, Brothers came back to win 6 to 4. The next day, Brothers took on Grant, and not to be outdone by Latino, Mel Knezovich hurled a no hitter in a five inning contest. Knezovich struck out 15 of the 17 batters to face him. A week later, the Gaels defeated a strong Stockton team 6 to 4. Knezovich not only was the winning pitcher, but he also slugged a three run double to pace the offense.

Rounding out an impressive March, Brothers defeated St. Mary's of Berkeley on a based loaded double by Dick Markham. Johnny Latino was the winner in the 5 to 2 contest.

## The Hottest Team in Town

Brothers had played the best teams surrounding Sacramento, and now it was time to test their mettle against the local high schools. On April 5<sup>th</sup>, Mel Knezovich introduced himself to the McClatchy Lions by spinning a two hit shutout with 8 strikeouts in a 5 to 0 victory. Ronnie King supplied the offense, going 3 for 3 for the streaking Gaels, who had now won six straight games.

During the war, it was common to play base teams made up of minor and major league players. Brothers beat the Mather Flyers on April 6<sup>th</sup>, fueled by a 10 run 6<sup>th</sup> inning. John Boroja was the hitting star and John Latino was the victorious pitcher.

In one of the most improbable games of the year, sophomore Matt Puliz, making his first start of the year, shut out San Juan 12 to 0, striking out 15 batters. Mel White was 3 for 5, and Dick Markham slugged a homer.



Ronnie King was an All City selection in 1946 and one of the finest catchers in CB history.

Traveling to Stockton on April 10<sup>th</sup> for their return match with the Tarzans, Ronnie King lined a single with the bases loaded in extra innings to win the game 5 to 4. Heading into the big showdown with Sac High, Brothers had put up some impressive statistics. Ronnie King was batting 565, and Mel Knezovich was 4 and 0 with 37 strikeouts in 29 innings.

### **Disappointment**

After winning two more tune-up games, Brothers had now won ten consecutive contests, and on April 20<sup>th</sup> they squared off against their arch rivals at Southside Park. Sac High's George Stanich had been just as dominant as Mel Knezovich during the first half of the 1945 season, and he got the better of the Gael hurler in their first duel. A fourth inning single by Charley Herrera was the only blemish on Stanich's one hit shutout in a 5 to 0 Dragon victory. CB righted the ship three days later in defeating St. Mary's of Stockton 3 to 2 in 10 innings. The game's highlight happened in the third inning when Gil Urbano stole second, third, and home.

On April 26<sup>th</sup>, Brothers took on McClatchy for the second time, and in a very close game, the Lions bested Knezovich 2 to 1. Ronnie King supplied the only run with a mighty home run in the third inning.

### **Three Way Champions**

Brothers rebounded from the tough McClatchy defeat by socking it to Roseville High 8 to 1. Young Matt Puliz returned to the mound and gave up just three hits while striking out 10. Dick Markham was the offensive star, driving in four runs. Before the much anticipated matchup with Sac High, Brothers lost to St. Mary's of Stockton, but defeated Courtland the next day 6 to 2. A win over Sac High on May 9<sup>th</sup> would establish a three way tie for the city championship, and Mel Knezovich was given the assignment.

Paced by the timely hitting of Gil Urbano, Clyde Haskell, and Ronnie King, Brothers won the important game 5 to 3. An impressive win over St. Mary's of Berkeley, two days later, rounded out an outstanding season for the Gaels as they posted a sterling 16 to 2 record.

## **1946**

As new coach Roy Misfeldt studied his 1946 roster, he must have been quite pleased with the melodious mix of youth and experience.

He had capable batsmen, speed and defense up the middle, and the one thing every baseball manager can not get enough of -- excellent starting pitching. In the *Sacramento Union's* annual high school preview edition, Hank Hollingworth wrote:

**Christian Brothers Coach Roy Misfeldt is looking forward to the 1946 baseball season with a smug countenance, and when one glances over his roster the reason is apparent. Why? Because his nine is equipped with a stronger battery than any Sacramento unit has possessed in many moons.**

The staff was anchored by Mel Knezovich and sported veterans Bill Zanze, Matt Puliz, and Donald Knezovich. Catching this impressive quartet would be Ronnie King, a polished receiver and the possessor of one of the most feared bats in Sacramento. As spring practice came to a close, Coach Misfeldt's penciled in a starting nine of:

2B: Joe Lutzy  
SS: Jim McNamara  
C: Ronnie King  
3B: Gil Urbano  
1B: Dick Markham  
LF: Doc Cuffe  
CF: Vince Vallarino  
RF: Manuel Cazares  
P: Mel Knezovich/Bill Zanze

### **Dominating the Local Schools**

After a few tune up games, the season began on March 16 at William Land Park, Bill Zanze squared off against McClatchy's ace Dick Luttig. In a close game where Brothers found themselves trailing in the seventh inning, Gil Urbano smashed a double, scoring Jimmy McNamara with the winning run.

Zanze was effective giving up only three hits, and was the winning pitcher. Brothers next traveled to St. Marys High School in Berkeley where Bill Zanze hurled a three hit shutout. Jimmy McNamara and Doc Cuffe each had two hits in the 1 to 0 victory. Mel Knezovich took his turn against the Wolves of Woodland, shutting them out 10 to 0, thanks to the benefit of a 10 run sixth inning, and the 3 for 4 slugging of Gil Urbano. On the eve of the big game against Sacramento High, young Don "Ducky" Knezovich got the assignment against the Herd of Elk Grove.



Gil Urbano hit .625 and was chosen Player of the year by the Sacramento Union for the 1946 season.

Proving his mettle, Ducky continued the pitching dominance by striking out 8 in a three hit 3 to 1 victory. Gil Urbano continued his hot hitting with a two run double in the first inning.

### **A Collapse and a Win!**

An overflow crowd packed William Land Park's Diamond 1 on April 24<sup>th</sup> for the showdown of undefeated teams. The crowds were so large that temporary grandstands had to be erected to accommodate the fans. Tragedy nearly struck before the first pitch when an entire section of the crowded stands collapsed. Miraculously, no one was injured, although one elderly gentleman's cane was snapped in two pieces.

Once the grandstand drama quelled, the spectators were treated to a thrilling game that saw Brothers win 4 to 3. Plucky Mel Knezovich garnered his fifth victory of the year as he gave up only 6 hits, while striking out 14. Timely hits by Ronnie King, Gil Urbano, and Vince Vallerino paced the offense.

### **Undefeated**

After beating Elk Grove High for the second time, Brothers took on El Dorado High School and continued their winning ways behind Don Knezovich with a 9 to 3 victory. Gil Urbano had a productive day with a single, double, and home run, and Ronnie King contributed a double and a triple.

Brothers closed out the year with two dominant victories over Roseville High. Mel Knezovich won the first game of the series 13 to 1, striking out 11, and tallying two hits. Three days later, brother Don



**The 1946 Undefeated Christian Brothers Baseball Team**

*Front: Joe Kirrene, Gil Urbano, Joe Lutzy, Ronnie King, Vince Vallerino, Jim McNamara, Don Knezovich, and Clarence Loeffler. Standing: Brother Kevin, Bob Slakey, Carl Moynahan, Mel Knezovich, Daniel Corcoran, Dick Markham, Manual Cazares, James Heon, Thomas Rubidoux, and Roy Misfelt*

shut out the Tigers on just 3 hits. Gil Urbano and Ronnie King each had three hits to spark the offense. With the Roseville series in the books, Brothers finished the year undefeated, with a 14 and 0 record.

Third Baseman Gil Urbano hit 625 for the season, and was chosen as the *Sacramento Union's* most outstanding player for 1946. He was also named the captain of the All City Team. Ronnie King was also named to the squad. In lauding King's season, **The Union** wrote: "Catcher Ronnie King earned his slot without a dissenting vote. If the team merits a co-captain, the star backstop could easily be raised to a spot beside his third base mate." Pitcher Mel Knezovich was the third representative from Brothers to make the coveted team.

## 1947

"Good field and no hit" is what the local papers said about The Gael ball team on the eve of the 1947 campaign. Ominous headlines aside, new Coach Ray Curry had little reason to think that his squad would not repeat as city champions due to his dizzying depth of pitching. The Knezovich brothers were back, Mel and Don. And so was hard throwing Bill Zanze. The trio made up the best staff in town in 1946, and there was no reason to believe that 1947 would be any different.

As the home opener against the Woodland Wolves loomed, Coach Curry trotted out the following lineup:

2B: Joe Lutzy  
SS: Jim McNamara  
1B: Russ Crocco  
3B: Joe Kirrene  
LF: Dick Markham  
CF: Vince Vallarino  
RF: Al Anicich  
C: Vince Pisani  
P: Bill Zanze

### Who Says We Can't Hit!

Behind the timely hitting of Dick Markham who was 3 for 4 with 2 doubles, and the steady pitching of Bill Zanze, Brothers won their opening game against Woodland High School.



Jim McNamara was an All City shortstop  
For the Gaels in 1947.



A few days later, they packed up the bus for Fresno to take on San Joaquin Memorial High School. Don Knezovich's first start was outstanding, as he scattered four hits in an 8 to 2 victory. Offensively, Russ Crocco, Al Anicich, and Vince Pisani all had great days at the plate, while Jim McNamara sparked the defense with two double play turns.

With the first two tune up games out of the way, it was time to concentrate on the important city games, and on March 28<sup>th</sup>, ace Mel Knezovich squared off against McClatchy High and nearly defeated the Lions single handedly. Not only did Knezovich pitch a one hit shutout, striking out nine, he also smacked a triple, double, and a single. Aiding Knezovich in the 11 hit attack were Vince Vallarino and Joe Kirrene with three hits apiece, while Jim McNamara added a triple and single.



Mel Knezovich went 11 and 0 for the undefeated 1946 Gael's team.

### **A Tough Patch**

Brothers lost two close games to Woodland and Elk Grove before the important showdown with Sacramento High. The Dragons came into the game undefeated and eager to stop Brothers' perennial dominance. In a terrifically pitched contest, where Mel Knezovich gave up only four hits, Brothers fell to the high school 2 to 1. Dick Markham's steal of home accounted for the only Gael tally. Brother's losing ways continued a few days later when the Flames of Lodi High got the better of them 4 to 3. Going into the second part of the season, Brother's record stood even at 4 wins and 4 losses.

### **The Best Team in Town**

The Gaels would not lose to another prep team the rest of the year. They got the better of Lodi High in the rematch, behind the hitting and pitching of Mel Knezovich, 4 to 3. They gained sweet revenge on Elk Grove 7 to 3 behind the mighty bat of Joe Kirrene. When St. Marys of Berkley came to town, Brothers got the better of them as well in a 5 to 3 victory.

Sac High came into the final game riding a 10 game winning streak and certainly considered heavy favorites. Bill Zanze was given the assignment, and he did not

disappoint in a 15 to 2 thrashing. The so called light hitting Gaels gave Zanze plenty of support. Joe Kirrene led the attack with two doubles and a triple, while Vince Vallarino had a double and two singles. Brothers touched up the vaunted Sac High staff for 18 hits.

The hot hitting continued two days later when St. Elizabeth's of Oakland felt the Gael lumber in a 9 to 0 victory. Mel Knezovich completely throttled the Oak Town Nine permitting only one hit, while fanning 9. Al Anicich and Joe Lutzy supplied the offense with three hits apiece. Anicich was just getting warmed up. The next day he would go four for four as Brothers defeated McClatchy for the second time, 7 to 2.

### Another Great Year

Although Brothers lost a tough game to the St. Mary's Freshman team 9 to 4 to close out the season, nothing could diminish their brilliant play in the second half of the season. Bob Slakey, who covered Christian Brothers sports for the school newspaper had this to say about the 1947 team:

What started out this year to be a team weak at the plate has ended up being the best hitting club in the city. The Gaels proved themselves to be the real city champs in pounding out an 18-hit, 15 to 2 victory over Sac High and soundly trouncing McClatchy twice. The Gaels could boast of three top-flight hurlers, six players batting above 300, two of whom, Joe Kirrene and Al Anicich were above the 400 mark, and, on the field, the best infield and outfield by far in the city. Last Wednesday ended the season of the soundest prep club I have ever seen.

The *Sacramento Union's* all city team for 1947 featured four Gaels, including Mel Knezovich who was selected as co-captain. Dick Markham, Vince Vallarino, and Jim McNamara rounded out the first team, while Bill Zanze, Joe Kirrene, and Al Anicich received honorable mention.

### Bob Slakey

*Taken from the  
1947 Yearbook*



From his sophomore year, Bob Slakey, outstanding Gael sports editor, has had the idea of being a journalist. An expert on statistics, Bob has been the official scorer in football, basketball, and baseball here for the last three years. He has also been a staff writer for the Sacramento Bee covering high school sports. Although Bob does well in trig, he is also an expert on hits, runs, and RBI's and prides himself that he never lost an argument on baseball rules — even to Dick Markham.

Asked for his all-star baseball team for the three years he kept score, Bob listed:

Mel Knezovich, p  
Ronnie King, c  
Dick Markham, 1b  
Joe Lutzy, 2b  
Jim McNamara, ss  
Gil Urbano, 3b  
Al Anicich, IF  
Vince Vallarino, cf  
Joe Kirrene, rf

Said athletic moderator, Brother Eugene, "Bob's services to the athletic department have been invaluable. It will be many a moon before we get another boy so efficient and wholehearted in his work."

## 1948

In an interview before the season Coach Ray Curry stated: "I've got a terrific hitting squad, but at present my pitching is of unknown quality." This statement stood in stark contrast to what was said about the pitching rich squads of the previous years. Graduation had taken pitchers Bill Zanze and Mel Knezovich leaving Don Knezovich as the anchor of a staff that included Sid King, Jack Pickart, and Jim Church. Veteran catcher Vince Pisani looked to provide another steady year behind the plate.

Joe Kirrene was the undisputed leader of the offense and looked to have an even bigger year than his 1947 all city campaign. The power hitting outfield featured Al Anicich in left, Captain Dick Markham in center, and Tony Boroja in right.

### A Fast Start

Brothers came roaring out of the gates winning 6 straight games before taking on their first city school test against McClatchy where they eked out a 2 to 1 victory. The Gael offense could only muster one hit, and their winning run came when Jerry Mikacich laid down a perfect squeeze bunt to score Vince Pisani. Don Knezovich was the winner, twice pitching out of bases loaded jams.

Rain would wash away much of the early schedule and it shortened a tight 0 to 0 duel between Brothers and Sacramento High on March 10. With additional victories over Lodi, twice, Rio Vista, McClatchy and Grant, Brothers once again looked like the strongest team in the city. Writing for the school newspaper, Bob Slakey reported on the team's success:

**The mound staff of Don Knezovich, Jack Pickart, and Jim Church was the highlight of the squad. Knezovich and Pickart were the standouts. Pickart's four hit victory over McClatchy, Knezovich's stretch of allowing 2 earned runs in his first 34 innings, Church's two hit shout out of Woodland were the best performances.**



**Vince Pisani was a three sport star at CB, and an All City selection in 1948**

## Joe Kirrene Dominates Sac High

With two victories over McClatchy, and a scoreless tie with Sac High, Brothers had a chance to win the city championship for the fourth straight year. The large crowd at William Land Park was treated to a slugfest that saw Brothers victorious, 9 to 7. Joe Kirrene was almost alone responsible for the victory. In the first inning, he sent the Gaels into the lead with a triple. In the third he singled home another. And in the seventh, with the bases loaded, he homered, clearing the bases. All in all, CB pounded out 14 hits, and once again could claim the city championship.

With the season coming to a close, The Gaels were well represented on the *Sacramento Union's* All City team. Vince Pisani, Dick Markham, Don Knezovich, and Al Anicich were all selected to join two time honoree Joe Kirenne.

**Record: 10-1-1**

## 1949

Brother Eugene Ward took over the baseball coaching chores for the 1949 season. More of a basketball specialist, Brother Eugene admitted that most of his baseball knowledge was learned via the printed word. However, growing up in San Francisco, he was a neighbor of hall of famer Joe Cronin, and his older brother Jack was a power hitting outfielder who had a few cups of coffee with the Cleveland Indians.

Brother Eugene inherited a team that had lost several key players to graduation including Vince Pisani, Dick Markham, Jack Pickart, and Joe Lutz. Yet the nucleus of pitcher Don Knezovich, outfielder Al Anicich, and 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman Joe Kirrene clearly established Brothers as the favorite to win the city championship for the fifth consecutive year.

## Brothers In The Big Leagues

*Joe Kirrene  
Class of 1949*

Joe Kirrene was one of the finest ball players to ever don a Gael uniform. As a power hitting third baseman, Kirrene was selected to the All City Team an unfathomable three times.

Following graduation in 1949, Joe signed with the Chicago White Sox, and quickly rose through the organization.

Just one year out of high school, Joe made his major league debut with the White Sox going 1 for 4.



After service in the Coast Guard, Joe returned to the White Sox in 1954, and in 23 at bats, he banged out 7 hits for a .304 average.

In 1955, Joe played with both the San Francisco Seals and the Oakland Oaks in the Pacific Coast League where he hit .257 with 3 home runs and 43 RBI's.

Joe's lifetime major league batting average was .296.

## 16 Straight Wins

In one of the most dominant prep baseball seasons ever witnessed in the Sacramento area, the Gaels tore through 16 straight wins before falling to powerful Sacred Heart of San Francisco.

Even in defeat, Brothers made headlines due to a monstrous home run from the bat of Joe Kirrene. According to newspaper accounts, Joe hit a ball a full city block, bouncing once and disappearing over a house roof.



The 1949 Christian Brothers Baseball Team won 16 straight games in route to The City Championship.

Some of the highlights of the win streak included Jim Church's three hitter against Woodland, Bob Lehtola's two hitter over Lodi, and Don Knezovich's shutout over Napa. Offensively, Joe Kirrene, Don Knezovich, Al Anicich, and Albie Brown all hit over 400 during the winning streak. Catcher John McNamara added timely hits while slowly building a reputation as the finest backstop in the city.

## The City Championship Games

Don Knezovich baffled the Sacramento High Dragons in their first encounter by a score of 6 to 1. His only run was of the unearned variety. The offense belted 10 hits, led by Joe Kirrene, Al Anicich, and George Radovich.

A week later, Knezovich's arm and bat got the best of McClatchy in a 12 to 4 victory, as he rapped out two hits in addition to his stellar pitching. According to newspaper accounts, he would have had a shutout, but three fielding miscues by his mates led to four unearned runs. For good measure, Knezovich defeated McClatchy later that week once again by the resounding score of 12 to 2.

McClatchy finally got to Brothers in the final of their three game series: Lion

first baseman Mike Virga's home run was the deciding tally in a close 8 to 7 contest. In their last game of the year against St Mary's College Freshman, Brothers lost another close game 7 to 6. Brother Eugene's first year had been a rousing success as the Gaels ended up 19 and 3.

### **All City**

As befitting their record, Christian Brothers dominated the *Sacramento Union All City Team*, by placing 5 members on the mythical squad. Don Knezovich was a unanimous selection as a starting pitcher, as was 16 year old junior catcher John McNamara. Third baseman Joe Kirrene, widely regarded as the best player in the city, made his third consecutive all city team. Rounding out the awards, heavy hitting outfielders Al Anicich and Albie Brown were both selected to the coveted team.

**Record: 19 and 3**

## **1950**

All City Basketball coach Jack Buick took over the coaching reins for Brother Eugene, who was now teaching and coaching at St. Marys High School in Berkeley. Coach Buick inherited a team bereft of power, due to the graduations of sluggers Joe Kirrene, Albie Brown, and Al Anicich. And, for the first time in over a decade, Brothers would field a team without a member of the Knezovich Family.

However, an impressive battery comprised of All City catcher John McNamara and mound ace Jim Church instilled confidence that Brothers might reach their sixth straight city championship.

### **Jim Church's All Around Play**

The Gaels opened the season in Chico with a victory behind the strong pitching of Jim Church 9 to 1. Church also rapped out two hits including a double. After a few more tune up games, including a tough shut out loss to Woodland High, Brothers began the inter-city portion of their schedule with a March 10th showdown with Sac High. In a very tight contest, Jim Church pitched a strong game, giving up only three runs. Ken Orvick's bases loaded double provided the offense, as Brothers bested a strong Dragon squad 4 to 3.

Heavy hitters Pete Vartanian, Ken Orvick, and Pete Mikacich spoiled Brother Eugene's return to Sacramento, as Brothers defeated St. Marys of Berkeley 9 to 8. A week later, Brothers gained revenge on Woodland by unleashing 13 runs

from the bats of John McNamara, Chado Vasquez, and Gene Lynch, who each had two hits.

### A Tough Lion Team

With an early victory over Sac High in their pocket, Brothers looked forward to the McClatchy game and a shot at their 6th straight city championship. However, a very powerful Lion squad, led by pitching star Tony Stathos, bested Brothers 9 to 2.

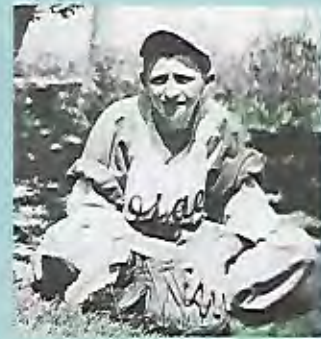
Jim Church returned Brothers to their winning ways in a 4 to 3 victory over former Coach John Gianonni's Lodi Flames. Church's strong right arm hurled another victory three days later in San Francisco as Brothers defeated Sacred Heart 4 to 3.

### A Spirited Run

Brothers avenged an early season defeat to Grant behind the bats of Sam Vartanian and John McNamara, 5 to 0. A week later, Jim Church won his fifth game of the year over St. Marys of Berkeley 8 to 6. The following week, Brothers defeated Roseville and Rio Vista with the Vartanian Brothers, Sam And Pete, providing the offense.

## Brothers in the Big Leagues

### John McNamara Class of 1950



John McNamara was an outstanding defensive catcher for the Gaels, earning all city selections in 1949 and 1950. He would never make the majors as a player, although he did play for the Sacramento Solons in 1956. In 1959 he would become a player/manager with Lewiston in the Northwest League, a minor league affiliate with the Kansas City A's. John would advance up the minor league ladder, nurturing young stars Reggie Jackson, Sal Bando, and Tony LaRussa, and many others along the way.

In 1967 John reached the big leagues as a third base coach for the Kansas City A's. The team soon moved to Oakland, and in 1969, McNamara was named manager at the age of 37. Although his 90 and 72 record was the best A's effort since 1920, McNamara was fired after a second place showing. He would go on to manage for 19 years compiling a record of 1,167 and 1,242, ranking 41<sup>st</sup> on the all time managerial list. He also managed and/or coached the Giants, Padres, Angels, Reds, Red Sox, and Indians.

In 1979, McNamara managed the Cincinnati Reds to the division crown, and in 1981 his Reds had the best record in all baseball, but failed to make the post season, due to a split season brought on by the baseball strike.

McNamara will be most remembered by the 1986 post season as the manager of the Boston Red Sox. Game 5 of the 1986 ALCS is still considered to be one of the greatest games in major league history. Down to their last strike and behind by 3 runs, his Red Sox would claw their way back to win in 12 innings, fueled by an iconic home run by Dave Henderson. Squaring off against the heavily favored New York Mets in the World Series, McNamara's Red Sox would battle them for 7 games, only to lose in heartbreaking fashion. John McNamara would earn the Manager of the Year award in 1986. His last year managing was in 1996 with the California Angels.



## No City Championship

As the season neared completion, Brothers still had an outside chance to win the city championship when they met the Dragons of Sac High on April 29th at McClatchy Park. The game was a rough affair, epitomized by a close play at the plate in the 4th inning, where Gael catcher John McNamara was spiked in the knee, forcing him from the game. Behind the strong pitching of Mike Acker and the timely hitting of Harry Dunlop, the Dragons pulled out a 6 to 3 victory. Their shot at a sixth consecutive city championship was denied. **Record: 12 and 5.**

## Season Wrap Up

Brothers finished the season with a 15 and 6 record, and placed three members on the *Sacramento Union's* All City team: catcher John McNamara, pitcher/left fielder Jim Church, and first baseman Ken Orvick. Describing McNamara's season, The Sacramento Union wrote:

**McNamara is rated as one of the best prep catchers to ever come out of a local school, and is an almost certain prospect to sign a pro contract, following in the footsteps of his brother Jimmy, now a shortstop for Idaho Falls in the Pioneer League.**

Jim Church had an all around great year going 6 and 1 as a pitcher and hitting 429 as a left fielder. Ken Orvick handled 106 chances at first base without an error, while slugging 309.

## 1951

Jack Buick was back for his second season as varsity baseball coach and he presided over a team short on experience but long on potential. The staff was anchored by Bill Wexted, Bruce Wood, Jim



The 1951 Christian Brothers Gaels Baseball Team



Winchell, and Pete Mikacich. Catcher Sam Vartanain was thought of as one of the better hitters in the league while Chado Vasquez looked to continue his fine play at second base. Joe Sheehan, Tom O'Donnell and Frank McNamara looked to patrol the outfield and provide offensive sparks for the young team.

### **A Mixed Start**

Brothers opened the year with a tough loss to Sacramento High School 7 to 2. Sam Vartanian was the lone bright spot, tallying the only two hits the Gaels would get that day. Big Sam continued his hot hitting to the next game with a sizzling 5 for 5 day, as Brothers trounced Woodland 19 to 4. After beating Lodi in a close game 8 to 7, Bruce Wood would two hit Chico High for their third consecutive victory. Big hits by Joe Sheehan and Frank McNamara would pace the offense.

### **Local Competition**

The Gaels second shot at Sacramento High School ended in a 5 to 4 defeat that was not decided till the final at bat. Brothers was back in the win column a few days later with a 15 to 1 rout over Jackson High. Vartanian drove in six of the runs and relief pitcher Bill Wexted slugged a homer.

In their first game against the powerful McClatchy squad, the Gaels were no match for the undefeated Lions, losing 15 to 1. Frank McNamara was the lone bright spot with a 3 for 4 day.



**Frank McNamara and Sam Vartanian were captains of the 1951 Baseball Team**

Bouncing back from the tough defeat, Bob Short pitched well in a 5 to 1 victory over Rio Vista. Vartanian continued to terrorize local pitching with a three hit day, featuring a massive home run.

Brothers saved their best game of the year for the rematch with McClatchy.

However, it looked as though it would be a repeat of the earlier 15 to 1 drubbing, as the Lions built a 9 to 0 lead in the seventh inning. Brothers fought back and thanks to a double by Frank McNamara and consecutive triples by Gene Lynch, Tom O'Donnell, and Chado Vasquez, they were able to tie the game at 11 as darkness fell. The tie would be the only blemish on the powerful Lions' undefeated record.



Outfielder Tom O'Donnell made the 1951 All City Team

A week later it would be Brothers' turn to blow a big lead, as Jackson High fought back from a 9 to 0 deficit to tie the game 15 to 15. Returning to city competition, Brothers swept a two game series with Grant High with Vartanian, O'Donnell and Lynch doing the heavy hitting.

### **Below 500**

After the twin victories over Grant, Brothers would drop 4 of their last 5 games, including tough defeats to McClatchy and Sac High. For the first time in as long as anyone could remember, Brothers finished a baseball season with a below 500 performance and a 6-8-2 record.

Outfielder Tom O'Donnell was the lone representative on the All City Team, and Sam Vartanian got an honorable mention for his stellar season.

At the annual year end baseball banquet at the Chucker, Gene Lynch was given a trophy for the most loyal Gael, while Frank McNamara and Sam Vartanian were elected captains.

**Record: 6 and 8 and 2**

### **Overall record from 1930 to 1951:**

**211 wins**

**71 losses**

**4 ties**

**12 City Championships**

## 1952

The 1952 edition of Christian Brother's Baseball featured the return of All City slugger Tom O'Donnell, power hitting infielder Pete Mikacich, smooth fielding infielder Chado Vasquez, and promising pitching prospect Dave Higgins.

The season got off to a bleak start for new coach Bill McGlothlin, when star first baseman Pete Mikacich was injured in an early non-league contest. The Gaels closed out the first part of their schedule with a loss to Stockton High School 9 to 1, in spite of Tom O'Donnell's sizzling 3 for 4 performance. Other highlights from the early schedule featured hurler Dave Higgins beating McClatchy in a close pitcher's duel. The Brothers' victory snapped an impressive 40 game winning streak by the Lions, and cemented Higgins' reputation as an up and coming star.



Chado Vasquez

The 1952 season featured a special contest at Edmunds Field on May 9th. The promoters paired two high school teams (CB and Grant) and two college teams (Sacramento State and San Jose State) to square off in a twilight double header. Before 1,100 paying customers, CB beat Grant 7 to 6. Ed Berry led the Gaels with a 2 for 4 day, while Dave Higgins notched the victory. Higgins saved his best for the end by striking out the last two batters with the bases loaded.

On May 12th, Brothers beat Grant again, with Chado Vasquez and Ed Berry each going 3 for 4. Later that week Jerry Kirrene's single with the bases loaded in the last inning was the difference in an 8 to 7 victory over Sacred Heart.

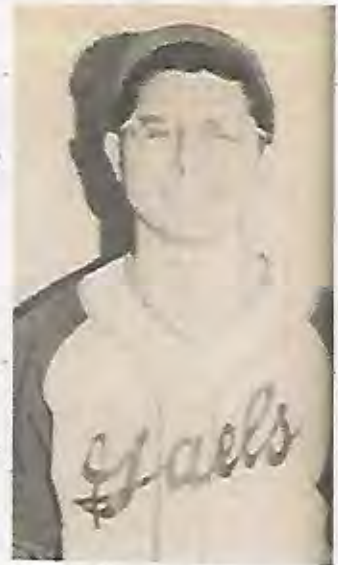
Brothers had built some momentum going into the rematch with McClatchy, however, the revenge minded Lions got to Dave Higgins early, touching him up for 5 runs in the first inning in route to a 17 to 7 pasting. Chado valiantly stroked three hits in the losing effort.

The Gaels returned to the win column on May 21st when they defeated Woodland 10 to 3. Lew Peebles, Tom O'Donnell, and Bill Wexted starred offensively.

Brothers finished with an 11 and 8 record. Impressively, they beat each of the city schools at least once. Tom O'Donnell finished the season with an even 400 batting average. Walt Short hit 371, Ed Berry hit 325, Jerry Kirrene hit 300, and Chado Vasquez came in at 271.

The end of the season banquet at La Rosa, hosted by the La Salle Club featured the team MVP award going to Tom O'Donnell. The team captains chosen were O'Donnell and Chado Vasquez. A special honorary captains pick was awarded to Pete Mikacich, who was injured early in the season.

Tom O'Donnell was selected to his second All City Team while Chado Vasquez and Jerry Kirenné were awarded honorable mentions.



**Pete Mikacich**

## 1953

Bill McGlothlin's one year stint as Gael coach came to an end when he resigned and returned home to San Francisco before the 1953 season. New coach Bob Rodness lamented the loss of veterans Tom O'Donnell, Chado Vasquez, and Pete Mikacich, but looked forward to a promising group of youngsters anchored by pitching star Dave Higgins.

Early season highlights included Mike Dana's grand slam in an 11 to 5 victory over Woodland. Speedy Ed Berry swiped 4 bases and Jerry Kirrene contributed two hits for the victorious Gaels.

Entering the City League section of their schedule, Brothers' record stood at 5 and 7. The 1953 team featured the return of a storied name to the Gael roster, as left fielder Rich Separovich made the squad as a sophomore. On May 5th, Separovich drove in 5 runs, including a game winning squeeze bunt, as Brothers nipped Grant 6 to 4.



**Members of the 1953 Christian Brothers Gaels Baseball Team**

Talented shortstop Larry Lynch was dazzling in the field, earning accolades in the local papers.

For the second consecutive year Brothers participated in the prep/collegiate double header under the lights at Edmunds Field. Facing a tough Grant team in front of 800 paying fans, Brothers trotted out a line up of:

Larry Lynch SS  
Ed Berry CF  
Rich Separovich LF  
George Thomas 1B  
Hector Leslie RF  
Jerry Kirrene 3B  
John Zanze 2B  
Dave Higgins P

Although Ed Berry, Jerry Kirrene, and Rich Separovich starred offensively for the Gaels, Grant prevailed 15 to 7.

Young Dick Beverly returned Brothers to the win column with a spectacular two hitter over St. Vincents of Vallejo. Ed Berry was the batting star and at midseason he was one of the league leaders, slugging his way to a .341 average.

After securing a tie with Sacramento High earlier in the year, Brothers played their most impressive game of 1953 by throttling the Dragons in the rematch 16 to 9. Jerry Kirrene and George Thomas each had three hits, and patient Gael eyes watched Dragon hurlers give up 14 walks.

Hoping to avenge an early season loss to the powerful McClatchy squad, Brothers lost in humiliating fashion 21 to 1. George Thomas scored the lone Gael run. The high flying Lions would go on to win their fifth straight City Championship. Brothers would finish the 1953 season with a 9-9-1 record.

Ed Berry would be the lone All City representative, while George Thomas and Jerry Kirrene would earn honorable mentions.



**Dave Higgins**

## 1954

Coach Rodness was back for the 1954 ball season, and he looked forward to improving on his even 500 record of 1953. He had a promising pitching staff of Dave Higgins and Dave Borges with freshman Bill Enos as a capable third starter.

With the early part of the schedule done, Brothers settled on a strong starting nine of:

Al Zuniga 3B  
George Thomas 1B  
Rich Separovich LF  
John Zanze C  
Charles Chatfield 2b  
Jim Bennett RF  
Don Terra CF  
Tony Carola SS  
Dave Higgins P

Following a disappointing close loss to McClatchy 5 to 4, and another tight defeat to Sacramento High, Brothers got hot and would go on to win 10 of their next 11.

### Hottest Team in Town

On May 2, Dave Borges held Reno to just 2 hits while striking out 14, as Brothers battered the biggest little city 10 to 2. John Zanze had three hits to pace the offence. For an encore, Borges three hit a tough Woodland squad 2 to 1, while striking out 10. The following week, freshman Bill Enos scattered six hits and struck out 10, as Brothers beat Grant 8 to 3. Don Terra, Al Zuniga, and George Thomas supplied the needed run support.

Sweet revenge struck on May 13th when Dave Borges beat McClatchy 12 to 2. Brothers hammered out 16 hits, highlighted by Rich Separovich's 4 hit game. Jim Bennett and John Zanze each tallied three hits as well.

Brothers was riding high as the annual prep/collegiate double header loomed at Edmunds Field. Once again, Grant was the opponent, and the teams battled to a 1 to 1 tie in front of 1,000 spectators.

As the season neared completion, two important rivalry games remained against McClatchy and Sacramento High. The Lions would be the first victim behind a flurry of 17 CB hits, including Jim Bennett's 2 run triple and Rich Separovich's 3 for 4 day. The Dragons of Sacramento did not fare any better, as Dave Higgins would scatter six hits in an 8 to 1 victory, Charles Chatfield's triple with the bases loaded proved to be the big hit.

Brothers finished the season with an impressive 13-4-1 record, going 4-3-1 in league play.

Dave Borges notched a 5 and 3 pitching record while batting 452 in 33 at bats.

Dave Higgins who was injured early in the season, finished with a 5 and 1 record and made the All City Team.



The 1954 Christian Brothers Gaels had a record of 13-4-1

Rounding out the awards, John Zanze, Rich Separovich, and Dave Borges were tagged as honorable mentions to the coveted team.

At the team banquet held at the Espanol restaurant, Higgins was chosen as the Team MVP while Charles Chatfield took him the Sportsman Trophy.

## 1955

Coach Rodness looked forward to the return of catcher John Zanze and slugging outfielder Rich Separovich to anchor a young squad as the 1955 season opened. The young Gaels struggled through their first 8 games going 1-6-1. Sophomore sensation Bill Enos pitched admirably, but was a victim of poor run support as he lost several close games.

After losing to Sac High in the opening game 4 to 2, Brothers circled the date May 3rd for the rematch against their arch rivals. Bill Enos was staked to any early 3 to 0 lead, behind run scoring singles by Jimmy Long and John Zanze. However, a late fifth inning Dragon rally sank CB's hope of an upset as they dropped the close contest at Land Park 5 to 4. Rich Separovich had two hits in the losing effort.

The highlight of the season was a spirited 9 to 0 victory over Reno. Don Peasavento hit a double and a triple, while Rich Separovich, John Pintar, and Tony Garrido had two hits apiece.



Jimmy Long had some timely hits for the 1955 team

Another bit of good news for Brothers was the overall outstanding play of the junior varsity team. On the same day that the varsity tangled with Reno, the jv team defeated the Reno juniors 12 to nothing, behind the no hitter of young Mike Barnhart.

Brothers was able to secure wins over Galt, El Camino, Chico, and Elk Grove, but fell in their third battle with Sac High 6 to 1. John Pintar was the batting star for the Gaels as he drove in the lone run.

Although the season would end with a disappointing 7-10-1 record, Coach Rodness had to be impressed with his young talent, especially the jv team who finished with a 17 and 2 record. After making honorable mentions on the 1954 All City Team, both outfielder Rich Separovich and catcher John Zanze were selected to the prestigious first team.

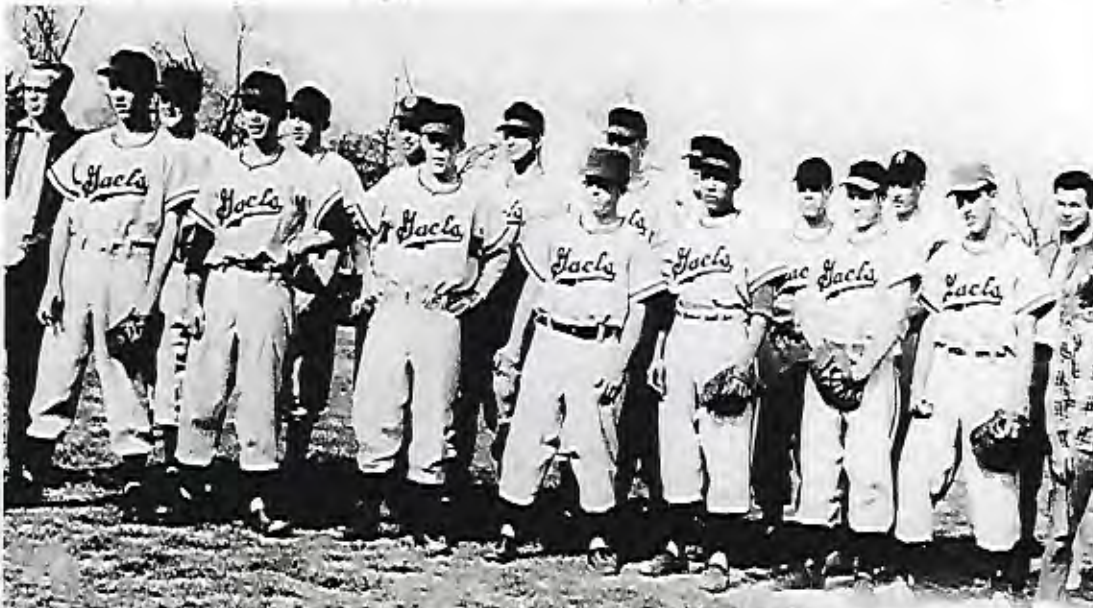
Separovich, according to the *Sacramento Union*: "drew much support because of his good arm and fielding. He led Christian Brothers in every batting department except home runs while hitting 337."

## 1956

1956 would be the last year a Christian Brothers team would wear the Gael uniform. With a squad brimming with young talent, Coach Bob Rodness made certain it would be a year to remember.

His opening day lineup featured:

Tony Garrido 1B  
Tom Higgins 2B



The 1956 Christian Brothers Gaels Baseball Team



Ernie Cervantes 3B  
Al Zuniga SS  
Jim Mikacich LF  
Bob Gatsis CF  
Dick Ferrola RF  
Ron Fernandez C  
Bill Enos P

## Dominant Pitching

In one of the most dominating pitching performances in local prep history, Bill Enos would compile an amazing 8 and 2 record with a 0.96 era, while striking out 96 batters. Marty Jennings would go 5 and 0.

On the offensive side, Bob Gatsis would hit 343, Tony Garrido 333, and Ernie Cervantes would post a 327 average.

Some of the highlights of the season included a 13 to 3 drubbing of McClatchy on May 2. Bill Enos was the winning pitcher, and Ernie Cervantes would have a three hit day including a mighty home run.

In the annual double header showdown at Edmunds Field on May 18, the Gaels were slated to take on a very tough Norte Del Rio squad. In a memorable pitching duel, Bill Enos outdueled the Norte pitcher in a tough 1 to 0 victory. Brothers only run was unearned. Brothers ended the season with an impressive 14 and 5 record.



Coach Bob Rodness



The first ever "Falcon" baseball team of Bishop Armstrong in 1957

## 1957

1957 brought an end to the storied Gael uniform. As the bright new Bishop Armstrong Campus opened on Sacramento Blvd, new jerseys were passed out to the ball players with the letters 'Falcons' sewn across the chest.

With Coach Bob Rodness still at the helm, the Falcons of Bishop Armstrong looked forward to matching the diamond excellence that the previous generations of Gaels had showcased.

Senior stalwarts Bill Enos and Jim Stewart paced a strong pitching staff buttressed by juniors Brett Pechuls and Mike Barnhardt. A powerful lineup of sluggers led by Bob Gatiss, Ernie Cervantes, Dick Mooney, Tom Higgins, and Pat Henretty assured the strong pitching staff that run support could be counted upon.

The Falcons soared out of the gate early with victories over Norte Del Rio, McClatchy, and Grant Union, before defeating arch rival Sacramento High 6 to 5.



Bill Enos and Jim Stewart warm up

After a disappointing tie with San Juan (5 to 5), the Falcons beat McClatchy in the rain 4 to 3, then thumped Elk Grove 18 to 3. Dick Mooney was one of the many hitting stars, clouting a memorable home run.

The boys from Bishop Armstrong finally tasted defeat at the hands of a tough Sacred Heart of San Francisco team by the score of 5 to 4. As the first part of the season came to a close, the Falcon Squad stood at 6-1-1. But some very challenging games loomed in the distance.

### The Unstoppable Pitching

In front of a large crowd at McClatchy's home diamond, Bill Enos threw a 2 hit shutout for an easy victory. The next week Jim Stewart beat Sac High 11 and 2. Jim Mikacich's triple and Dick Ferrola three hit day paced the offence.

The Falcons next faced a tough El Camino team at the annual prep double header at Edmonds Field, and Enos was his usual dominant self. Striking out 15, he blanked the Eagles 6 to 0 behind the batting power of Ernie Cervantes, who had three hits.

Bishop Armstrong would close out the 1957 season with a sparkling 16-2-1 record. Amazingly, each defeat was by one run. The Falcons were nearly undefeated.

When the *Sacramento Union's* All City Team was named, Bishop Armstrong needed a truck to get all the trophies back to campus. Bill Enos and Bob Gatiss were unanimous picks.

Also earning the first team status were Jim Stewart, Jim Mikacich, Ernie Cervantes, Pat Henretty, and Tom Higgins.

Bill Enos had a truly remarkable year, striking out 109 batters in just 76 innings.

There was little debate about who was the best team in the city. The Falcons were undefeated in league play and could truly claim the title of Mythical Champions of Sacramento.

Coach Rodness had compiled a 31 and 7 record over the past two seasons.



All City third baseman Ernie Cervantes strokes another hit in 1957

## 1958

After a fine run of six years as head baseball coach, Bob Rodness left the squad following the memorable 1957 season. He was replaced by basketball coach Jack Witry. The man from Chicago obviously knew a bit about baseball as well because his team got off to a great start in 1958.



Catcher Jim Mikacich would slug his way to the All City Squad in 1958

Bolstered by power hitting catcher Jim Mikacich and first baseman San Stassi, the Falcons crushed San Juan 14 to 9 to begin the season. The first part of the season was only blemished by two tough losses to McClatchy, as Bishop Armstrong blazed their way to a 6 and 2 start.

On May 8th, in their first contest with Sac High, Frank Stewart pitched superbly, as Armstrong took the close contest 4 to 3. Pete Mooney and Brian Roach were the hitting stars.

## The Baseball Tournament

Sacramento hosted the Northern Interstate Conference Baseball Tournament in 1958 at William Land Park. While the city teams played in the Metro League, the Falcons slugged it out with teams from the far stretches of Northern California. In the opening game, Bishop Armstrong beat Anderson 21 to 1. Dick Mooney was 4 for 4 while Sam Stassi and Jim Mikacich each slugged three hits.

The following day, in the championship game against Chico, the Falcons won the tournament by a score of 7 to 6. Tom Stinson scored the winning run on a botched squeeze play. Ric Cable, Ron Angell, and John Stassi all had two hit games.

Later that week at the awards banquet Sam Stassi was voted player of the year by his team mates. Jack Witry's foray into coaching was successful, as Bishop Armstrong ended the season with a 9 and 2 record. The *Sacramento Union* awarded All City status to slugging first baseman Sam Stassi and catcher Jim Mikacich.



The 1958 Bishop Armstrong Falcons were 9 and 2 under Coach Jack Witry

## 1959

As the 1959 season began, second year coach Jack Witry and his band of Falcons looked forward to defending their Northern Interstate Conference Title. With admission to the Metro League still being denied, Bishop Armstrong would once again have to play league games hundreds of miles away from Sacramento.

### Early Successes

Although slugger Jerry Mikacich would be missed, Coach Witry had many returning stars from his 15 win team of 1958. Sam Stassi was now the catcher while Tom Zanze, Frank Stewart, and Charley Esgro anchored the pitching corps.

Julius Resendez, Mike Elorduy, and Bob Separovich highlighted a potent offense while Pete Mooney and Fred Thomas supplied lockdown defense.

Some of the early season highlights saw Tom Zanze pitch a three hit shut out against Elk Grove. Fueled by Mike Elorduy's two runs scored, Armstrong came out on top 2 to 0. The following week, Zanze beat Grant 6 to 3 behind Julius Resendez's three for four day.

The only blemishes on the stellar 1959 season came at the hands of some old rivals. After winning six straight ball games, the Falcons squared off against the Dragons of Sac High on March 25 and lost a heartbreaker, 4 to 3. Freddie Stewart was the tough luck loser, pitching a complete game. Mike Elorduy and Freddie Thomas blasted two hits apiece to pace the offense. Two days later, the McClatchy Lions socked it to the Falcons 10 to 2.

### The Baseball Festival

The Falcons breezed through the rest of their schedule and looked forward to traveling up to Chico for the Northern Interstate Conference Baseball Festival with a lusty 13 and 2 record. In their opening matchup against Reno, Bishop Armstrong had just enough players to fill out a lineup card. One of the cars carrying several players was involved in an accident, After everyone was accounted for, and no serious injuries were reported, the carload of Falcons resumed the trip and arrived 45 minutes late.

Reno was a hot team and riding a 9 game winning streak, but behind the steady pitching of Frank Stewart and Charley Esgro, and a timely hit by Pete Mooney, the Falcons won the opener 4 to 3.



Tom Zanze was dominant in 1959



**Bob Separovich is safe at third**

Later in the day, Frank Stewart returned to the mound and scattered 4 hits in a complete game victory over Red Bluff, 2 to 1. Once again the Falcons were in the championship game, facing a tough team of Wolves from Shasta High School.

Wasting little time, Bishop Armstrong jumped all over the Shasta pitching in the first inning, scoring three runs

on successive singles by Julius Resendez, Pete Mooney, Freddie Thomas, and Bob Separovich. In the second inning, fueled by three Shasta errors, singles by Mooney and Butch Schuering, and a triple by Mike Elorduy, the Falcons tacked on five more runs to put away the Wolves early.

Tom Zanze cruised, scattering four hits in the 9 to 4 victory. Rounding out his outstanding overall day, the veteran hurler contributed two singles for good measure. Elorduy hit a booming triple to account for the Falcons final run. Mooney ended up going three for four, with a rousing double being the highlight.

The Falcon ballclub had won two straight Northern Interstate Championships, and Jack Witry ended his baseball coaching career with an impressive 31 and 5 record.

**Overall record  
1952-1959**

**101-43-4**



**The 1959 Northern Interstate Conference Champion Falcons**