

# Bulldogs End 16-year Skid

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Texas City Sun

After 16 years of waiting, the Hitchcock Bulldogs baseball team will play in the postseason.

To put that statement into perspective, consider this, about half of the Bulldogs were not even alive the last time Hitchcock played in the playoffs in 1988, and the others weren't alive two years earlier when the Bulldogs actually won a playoff game.

"Most of the younger guys don't understand what this means," said Glen Newsom, Hitchcock coach. "Actually, I don't know if many people understand it."

Newsom joined Hitchcock three seasons ago and has watched his team improve year after year.

"The senior leadership is a big reason for the turnaround this year," Newsom said. "We're senior heavy and those guys stepped up this year and rededicated themselves at practice. We were concerned because we graduated the bulk of our hitters last year, but these kids really stepped up."

Another person who has watched the improvement first hand is senior Cody Kemmerling.

"This really means a lot to be finally going to the playoffs after three losing records my previous three years here," Kemmerling said. "Pitching and leadership really came together this year to get us to this point."

While Kemmerling has waited three years for a trip to the playoffs, one junior on the team is getting his first taste of the postseason with the possibility of returning next season.

"It's great that we made it to the playoffs since the school went in football and basketball this year," said Marcus Bowles. "We didn't want to be the only team to not go to the playoffs this year. Nobody thought we could do it and that just motivated us more."

Bowles, a junior transfer from Dickinson, has liked what he has seen since joining the Bulldogs this season.

"Here at Hitchcock, you know everyone and we're a big family," Bowles said. "At Dickinson there were people who I didn't meet until the last day of school."

The sense of family is not limited to the walls of the high school, however.

"The crowds have gotten bigger at home games as the season has gone on," Newsom said. "It's great to get the recognition at school and in the community. Everyone really seems to be behind

us and is stopping us to ask how the season is going. Being a smaller school in a small town, everyone supports everyone else. Also, our kids aren't that cliquish and that really helps."

While the crowds have been getting bigger for Hitchcock, so has their production at the plate.

"We're just hitting the ball this year," said Chad Allen. "We probably have had some of the highest batting averages this year than we have ever had."

In addition to upping the production on the field, the latest installment of Hitchcock baseball is showing their skills in the classroom.

"The thing I really love about this group is how they've taken care of business on the field and in the classroom," Newsom said. "All 14 people on the team are the most dedicated bunch I've ever been around. We don't have any egos or people worried about their individual stats."

The Bulldogs wrap up the regular season Tuesday against East Bernard before turning their full attention to their playoff opponents and trying to extend the season as long as they can.

"The winning is nice, but we have good young men with character and I couldn't be prouder of them," Newsom said. "If they can learn a little and play with class, I've done my job win or lose."

As for whether it will be win or lose, most signs point to win according to one member of the team. That is once the team gets used to the idea of being in the playoffs.

"I think we've got a really good chance of doing well in the playoffs," Allen said. "As you can tell, we're not used to stuff like this because some of the kids on the team get really nervous around big games and the seniors have to be the ones who keep our teammates in the game and I didn't do a good job of that against Danbury. Hopefully heading into the playoffs everyone can shake off the jitters and then we can play some ball. We're real scrappy and we're going to get to you if you aren't ready."

The Bulldogs have been ready for 16 years and are getting the chance to show what they can do.

"This is the way to finish my senior year," Kemmerling said. "To go to the playoffs in all three sports and knowing that all of the work you did has paid off."