You are a reporter for the League-town Press, the student newspaper of League-town High School. From the given information, write a feature story as you would for the high school newspaper. You have 60 minutes. Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or entry. Put your number on your paper.

Leaguetown High School is located in Central Texas and has 2,500 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Last week, the baseball team held try-outs for the upcoming freshman, junior varsity and varsity teams. More than 100 athletes tried out for 25 open spots on the teams. Returning players do not need to try out.

Freshman Javier Olmos tried out for the team and made the varsity team. He is the only freshman to make that squad. Javier, who is 6-feet tall and weighs 200 pounds, is a pitcher, but what makes him unique is that because of a birth defect, he was born with only one hand — a right hand. Despite this, Javier had the fastest speed of any pitcher who tried out for the team. His fastball consistently clocked at 81 mph. Last year's starting pitcher, Sam Rocker, who now plays for Texas A&M University, threw a 78 mph fastball.

Javier started playing baseball when he was 4 years old and fell in the love with the game. He's played every season since then, moving to a select baseball team when he was 11. When Javier pitches, he places his glove on his left arm so that he can quickly put it on his right hand after he releases the pitch. He modeled this movement after Jim Abbott, a Major League Baseball pitcher who also has only one hand.

On Dec. 15, the varsity baseball team will have its alumni fundraiser game, and varsity baseball coach Dom Galvan said Olmos will be the starting pitcher for the game. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed this Wednesday, Dec. 12.

JAVIER OLMOS, freshman

“Ever since I can remember, my parents never treated me differently because of my condition. In fact, they pushed me to be just like every other kid. When I complained that I couldn’t do something — like hang from the monkey bars or hold on to a swing on the playground — they always told me, ‘Where there’s a will, there’s a way.’ I definitely found my will very early. I can’t remember ever not doing something because of my missing hand. It may have taken me a little longer to figure out how to do something, but I never gave up. My parents taught me that, and I am so grateful.

“Nobody treats me any differently now, but when I was younger, that wasn’t always the case. I still remember my first baseball practice. One of the kids on my team yelled that I couldn’t play because I was missing my hand, so when I got up to hit for the first time, I made sure I hit it over that kid’s head. He never said I couldn’t play again.

“My first baseball coach was great. When he found out I was on his team, he studied Jim Abbott and how he played. He taught me how to throw, how to put the glove on quickly and how to hold the bat using my left arm to
JAVIER OLMOS, continued

“From that very first game, I fell in love with baseball. I couldn’t wait for my dad to come home every night so we could play catch. When I was 10 years old, I started pitching. My coach at the time was worried about my ability to field a hard hit. I may not be the quickest fielder, but I am better than average. I try to make up for it with my pitching. I figure if no one hits off me, I’m totally safe. Last season, I had four games where no one hit off of me.

“Trying out for the school baseball team was nerve-wracking. I’ve had the same coach for four years. He knows what I can do and doesn’t treat me differently from anyone else. I was worried the coaches wouldn’t give me a fair chance, but that wasn’t the case at all.

“I was stunned when I saw my name on the varsity roster. My goal was to make a team — any team. I knew my pitching was solid, but I didn’t realize how much speed I had picked up in the last year. I don’t clock myself very often. I just pitch.

“It kind of freaks out some people that I bat. I use my left arm only for balance and stability, so that decreases the strength of my swing. I make solid contact consistently, but I haven’t ever hit a home run — yet. I am not giving up.

“I’m a little nervous about the game on Saturday. I’m going to be pitching to guys who are 19 and 20 years old. I’m 15 — barely. My birthday was last month. Coach Galvan said I will be fine, and I really hope he’s right. I guess the good thing is, the game is a fundraiser and doesn’t count for our season.”

DOM GALVAN, varsity baseball coach

“I had heard about Javier’s pitching before tryouts, but I figure the stories were a bit exaggerated. They were not. This kid might be the best pitcher to ever walk onto our fields, and he’s just 15. Imagine how fast he will be pitching when he’s a senior. I suspect colleges will start calling him by the end of next season.”

SERGIO OLMOS, Javier’s dad

“Ever since I took him to a Leaguetown varsity baseball game when he was 7 years old, Javier has dreamed of playing for the school team. When he called to tell me he made varsity, my entire office thought something horrible happened because I started crying right then and there. I was so proud.

“Sure, Javier has natural talent, but he also is the hardest working kid I know. He has to work twice as hard as a two-handed player. And he does. My son has a ball in his hand every chance he gets. When he doesn’t have anyone to practice with, he will throw the ball on the side of the house to play catch with himself. Or he will pitch into his net. Or he will hit off the tee. Every night he’s doing something with baseball. He’s driven, and he’s truly earned his spot on the varsity team.”

RED PLUMLER, senior and captain of the varsity team

“During tryouts, Javier pitched to me. I’m not ashamed to say he struck me out. His fastball is fast, but it was his curve ball that got me. I couldn’t believe that he’s only a freshman. He packs some heat. With him on our team, the district championship is within our reach.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The varsity baseball team won second in district last year. It was knocked out of the playoffs in the second round.