

YOUTH BASEBALL: Giants' Pyles wins EABC's Sonny Chaput Award (06/14)

By Nathaniel Bryan

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Ryan Pyles' parents (father Mike and mother Beth) and two older brothers (Davis and Ben) usually attend his baseball games, so seeing them University Drive Park was nothing new to the 12-year-old Giants third baseman, who was preparing to play in Game 2 of the Elizabethtown Area Baseball Commission's best-of-three major league world series.



Once his family stepped inside the fence to join him, though, Pyles realized Friday was no ordinary game.

Pyles is the 41st annual winner — and the 45th honoree since there were co-winners in 1989, '90, '93 and '98 — of the Knights of Columbus' Sonny Chaput Award.

The award recognizes 12-year-olds in their second EABC major league season. It's handed out in honor of Chaput, who was a Knights member and an EABC coach.

The winner has a good attitude on and off the field, displays good sportsmanship, accepts decisions of coaches and umpires, wins without boasting, loses without excuses, shows good leadership and has a good moral standing — qualities EABC major league director Mitch Clark listed before announcing Pyles as the winner before Pyles received his plaque from Grand Knight John Hartlage.

In his nomination, Clark read that Giants coach Jeff Kingery "describes him as respectful, a positive and calming influence on younger players and he's like having a secondary coach. He really knows the game of baseball."

"He's a humble kid," Kingery said. "And those comments that I made are so true. He's always respectful and he's always into the game. He pumps up the younger players and he really is like a secondary coach on the field with me, to be honest with you. There are certain times in the game when he'll come to me and say, 'Coach, what if we do this? What if we do that,' and those were things I hadn't even been thinking about, but he just knows the game of baseball and he's been around it for so long."

Jill Pickett
 Grand Knight John Hartlage, of Knights of Columbus Council 1455, presents the Sonny Chaput Award to Ryan Pyles on Friday at University Drive Park in Elizabethtown.

Clark said other coaches commented on Pyles' constant smile and friendly attitude and his ability to hang out with both teams after games, win or lose.

"I just try to act normal," Pyles said. "But it felt good to hear coaches talk about me that way."

Pyles is a six-time All-Star and a recipient of the Don and Karen Hill Award, which goes to players who have played in the league every year since they were 6. Kingery said Pyles, who bats third, has at least five home runs this season, including one which cleared the scoreboard in center field and the trees were the only things "stopping the ball from going into the road."

"He always makes contact and that one might have been the deepest shot that I've ever seen," Kingery said. "Trust me, when he hits 'em, they don't barely clear. When he hits it, he uncorks on it."

Pyles also played shortstop and first base this season for the Giants, who entered the playoffs as the fourth seed. He prefers first base, but Kingery said Pyles is the definition of a utility player.

"I like first base because I can see everybody and help everybody out if they need it," Pyles said, "and I've played there all my life, so I feel more comfortable."

Pyles said he tries to stay calm on the field, no matter the score or the adversity. And he knows what would happen if he lost is cool or questioned an umpire.

"Neither one happens and if it does happen, it will get stopped quick," Pyles said. "So it doesn't happen usually."

Both of Pyles' older brothers played several seasons in the EABC and were named All-Stars multiple times.

"He's had two really good role models to follow. There's a little bit of Ryan from both Ben and Davis," Mike said. "We're just proud to be part of the EABC. For Ryan to win this award, we're proud of him as a player and as a student and as a young man."

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Sonny Chaput Award Winners

Year: Winner

2015: Ryan Pyles