

## Former Chaparral baseball stars making it big in the big leagues

by **Richard Obert** - Apr. 23, 2010 The Arizona Republic

Chaparral coach Jerry Dawson has spent decades nurturing one of the state's top high school baseball programs. Sometimes, out springs a future major league player. Dawson now has three currently playing in the bigs.

- **First baseman Ike Davis** became the latest Monday when he singled in his first at-bat and went 2 for 4 in his New York Mets debut
- Former Chaparral **catcher Paul Konerko** plays first base for the Chicago White Sox
- ex-Chaparral **pitcher Brian Bannister**, who made his first major-league start with the Mets in 2006, is a starting pitcher for the Kansas City Royals

"Pretty special for this old guy," said Dawson, who has been going strong as Chaparral's only baseball coach since the school opened in 1973.

Chaparral won five state championships with those three players: in 1994 with Konerko, in '99 with Bannister, and from 2003-05 with Davis. Dawson, a pretty good judge of talent, knew all three were special when they were in his program.

"I saw it coming with Paul, and I saw it coming with Ike," Dawson said about players ending up in the major leagues. "I thought Banni was the sleeper in the class. He was the kind of kid you just never bet against. He'll do it. "Banni was so small coming out of high school, but you don't bet against work ethic."

Bannister (now 6-foot-2, 217 pounds) and Davis come from major league bloodlines. Bannister's father, Floyd, pitched for five big-league teams. Ike's dad, Ron, won a World Series as a pitcher with the New York Yankees.

Chaparral has reaped the harvest of talent with the area becoming home for retired major-league players. "It's not something that most kids grow up around, ex-pros working with them," Dawson said. "They're not as intimidated."

Davis (6-4, 215) and Konerko (6-2, 220) had God-given size and tools in high school that attracted scouts to their games. Davis (Arizona State) and Bannister (Southern California) took the college route, while Konerko signed pro (13th overall pick of the '94 draft, Los Angeles Dodgers) out of high school. Hank Konerko, Paul's father, who lives in Scottsdale, remembers how regimented Dawson's program was when his son played there.

He said everything from taking care of the field to proper stretching for fielding and hitting were emphasized.

"I remember my son telling me when he got into pro baseball that it was easier than playing at Chaparral," Hank said. "Jerry Dawson and (assistant coach) Mark Miller are two quality guys. They put their heart and soul into it. They push for what the kids are capable of doing."

Dawson continues to keep track of his players.

He said Ike Davis called him after his first game with the Buffalo Bisons, the Mets' Triple-A team. Paul Konerko came to a Chaparral baseball game this season during a break in spring training

"We've had several kids make it to Triple-A ball, but they've never gotten that . . . lucky bounce," Dawson said.