

Aug. 31 College Baseball

Steinert's Locklear makes Rider (and grand dad) happy with his decision

By Rich Fisher

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Aug. 31: Bob Barrett can open his mouth again.

But first he has to stop smiling from ear to ear.

Barrett is one of the biggest Rider University boosters in Mercer County and beyond, but his family put a gag order on him over the past four months while his grand son, Steinert's James Locklear, was trying to decide where to play college baseball.

The search ended today when the outfielder gave his verbal commitment to Broncs coach Barry Davis prior to starting his senior year at Steinert next week.

"We had to tie him down for the past five months," Locklear's mom, Christine Barrett, said of her father. "But he was very good about it. He behaved."

And when James gave him the word?

"He was speechless," Locklear said.

Now there's a first.

Locklear's bat was anything but speechless for the Spartans last spring. The tall, lanky speedster burst upon the varsity scene by leading Steinert in average (.522), hits (35) and home runs (six). He was second on the Spartans with 27 RBIs and, thanks to nine doubles and a triple in additions to his homers, had a .whopping 955 slugging percentage.

With his long strides, Locklear was outstanding in left field and also stole 8 of 10 bases. His stats were good but it's mostly likely his build and athletic ability (he led the Spartan hoop team in scoring) that provides potential for the future.

It didn't take him long to draw the eye of Division I programs, as a strong late-April surge put him on the radar.

"Basically I had to get comfortable, it was my first year playing varsity," Locklear said. "Once I got comfortable everything started coming along. I knew I had the potential to do very well and things just started going well for me."

Rutgers, Rider and St. John's showed the most interest. The search was narrowed to Rider and St. John's before the Broncs won out.

"It's a good fit for him," Steinert coach Brian "The Chef" Giallella said. "It's a good place to play, it's close to him, which he wanted, and it's still D-I. That's what one of his goals were and now he's done that."

"It seemed like the right fit when I was there," Locklear said. "That was the main thing. I felt it was right and I have a good opportunity to play Division I baseball. Nothing has been promised to me, I have to earn my spot."

Locklear's average dropped off during American Legion season but he still hit over .300 for Post 31.

"That's OK," said Giallella. "His average dropped slightly but it's a long season. That's the first time he's gone through it that long, and gotten all those at-bats. He realizes now he has to work and get stronger to realize the strength is still there at the end of the year."

Despite his power numbers, Locklear considers himself a line drive hitter who finds the gaps and uses his speed.

He said that becoming a Division I player started becoming a dream after he entered high school.

Today, the dream came true.

For both Locklear. . .and his grandfather.

