

Pirates need to take advantage of fan interest

PAUL ZEISE
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

PITTSBURGH — The Pirates don't deserve the attention of their fans, as they have no credibility with them. The Pirates have not just been bad for a decade — they have shown time and time again they don't care about winning.

There is just no reason for anyone to patronize the Pirates, no reason for anyone to pay attention to them and no reason for anyone to buy a ticket or spend one dollar on any of their merchandise.

I mean, if Bob Nutting doesn't care about his team and winning, why should anyone else, right?

All of that being said, the Pirates have managed to change the narrative for this season and get people at least somewhat interested in them. There seems to be a lot of optimism and a lot of people engaged in this season.

That's because the Pirates were able to make enough moves to convince people they are trying to win. They added some hitters and bolstered their pitching staff, and as a result, the optimism around them is higher than at any time since 2015.

That is incredible, considering most fans have seemingly given up on the Pirates, and that's mostly because they are not a fan of the owner. There is a lot of frustration with Nutting and the way he runs the team, as he is notoriously cheap and never seems to favor winning over his bottom line.

It is actually incredible the Pirates after the last five seasons have been able to get their fans engaged again based on a couple of talking points that may or may not be true.

Paul Skenes is obviously the easiest reason for fans to get reinvolved in the Pirates. Skenes is the Cy



Justin Berl/Getty Images/TNS

Pirates owner Bob Nutting speaks during the team's 2024 Hall of Fame induction ceremony before a game against the Cincinnati Reds at PNC Park in Pittsburgh.

Young Award winner from the National League and very much in the conversation for the best pitcher in baseball.

It isn't just that Skenes is really good, though. He has that "it" factor — he is confident, borderline cocky. He is electric, and every time he takes the mound, it is a national story. Skenes is one of the biggest names in Major League Baseball, and that makes every time he pitches an event.

I can't tell you the number of people I know who are casual Pirates fans who will go to games just to see Skenes pitch. He is that impressive

and that exciting and he is the top reason there are many people who want to watch what the Pirates do this season.

There are other reasons, though, as well, starting with two young, exciting pitchers in Braxton Ashcraft and Bubba Chandler. These two give the Pirates a chance to have a legitimate starting rotation, but obviously they have to perform when the lights are on.

Brandon Lowe was brought in to solidify the second base spot and he should be an upgrade in every way over Nick Gonzales. The Pirates also added Marcell Ozuna to upgrade the

designated hitter position and they have added a couple of outfield pieces, as well.

One of the main reasons the Pirates have recaptured their fan base is the idea that rookie phenom shortstop Konnor Griffin might be on the major league roster to start the season. Griffin is only 19, but he is the highest-rated prospect in the Pirates organization and there is a lot of excitement for his arrival.

I am all for Griffin making the major league roster if he is legitimately the best shortstop to start the season. I am also OK with the idea that Griffin needs some more work

in the minors (he has fewer than 100 plate appearances in Double-A and zero plate appearances in Triple-A) if it is determined he is not ready.

Pirates fans will not handle it well if Griffin is not on the major league roster because they are enamored with his talent and prospect rankings. But again, if he isn't ready, it would be silly to bring him to the major league roster just for public-relations reasons when spring training ends.

Griffin is one of the main reasons fans are engaged with the Pirates again, even though there is no guarantee of him being on the roster to start the season.

And I think that is the theme of this entire season — it is rare a team gets a chance to re-engage with its fan base without winning, but the Pirates have. They were able to do just enough this offseason to convince a large portion of fans, even the most cynical ones, that this year will be different than the last 10.

Now it is up to the Pirates to follow through on all their promises to take advantage of this reset among fans. It is important they don't have another year that goes off the rails by mid-May or a complete collapse in August.

It is imperative the Pirates don't fumble away this opportunity because there is actual, genuine interest in them at this point. The Pirates have had losing seasons recently and seasons when they have collapsed down the stretch, but that was expected, so it wasn't shocking in any way.

I really believe the Pirates have a chance to regain credibility among their fan base. They are at a critical point actually, as they need to get it right this time or Nutting and Co. will forever lose their fans.

Penguins finally win shootout, prevailing over Jets, 5-4

KING JEMISON
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

PITTSBURGH — Mired in a tight playoff race with a challenging stretch of opponents looming, the Penguins could ill-afford a loss to the Winnipeg Jets on Saturday.

It looked like they were headed

for one. But Erik Karlsson rescued Pittsburgh with a third-period equalizer, his second goal of the game. And the Penguins finally prevailed in a shootout to pick up a 5-4 victory at PPG Paints Arena.

Sidney Crosby and Rickard Rakell scored for Pittsburgh. Arturs Silovs stopped both attempts he faced.

Entering Saturday's matinee matchup, the Penguins went two days without a game for the only time in March.

They looked well-rested. About a minute into the game, Evgeni Malkin chipped the puck to Egor Chinakhov flying into the Jets' zone. Chinakhov made a nasty move to get

around Dylan DeMelo and whipped a shot past Connor Hellebuyck for the opening goal.

The Penguins blew leads of 2-0 and 3-2 to fall behind 4-3 in the third period.

The nervous energy inside the arena was palpable. Then Karlsson gave the packed crowd something to

celebrate again. He scored his second of the game, this time from the right faceoff circle, to tie the game with about seven minutes to play.

The Penguins peppered Hellebuyck in the 3-on-3 overtime period, but he made some saves reminiscent of his Olympic performance — especially his stop on Ben Kindel in tight.

► Penguins

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The period could have been even worse. Skinner had to sprawl out to save a series of shorthanded attempts on the Penguins' lone complete power play of the game (Pittsburgh spent the final seconds on an abbreviated man-advantage).

Pittsburgh broke up Frederik Andersen's shutout with about five minutes to play. Bryan Rust made a great feed to Egor Chinakhov, who

scored his second goal in as many games from in tight.

Mark Jankowski added an empty-netter with just more than a minute remaining.

It was over when ...

In many ways, Sunday's game felt over in the opening minute. But Jarvis' goal at the 17:20 mark of the second period was probably the true death knell.

Stat of the game

3-5: The Hurricanes' power play

efficiency. The Penguins' penalty kill is sorely missing Blake Lizotte, one of the team's shorthanded stalwarts all season. Lizotte is expected to miss essentially the remainder of the regular season with an upper-body injury.

Around the boards

— Rookie winger Ville Koivu was assigned to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League on Sunday. With Evgeni Malkin and Sidney Crosby returning, he'd been

scratched the previous two games, so this will allow him to get continued playing time.

— The Penguins announced Sunday that they have signed Bill Zonnon, one of their three 2025 first-round draft picks, to an entry-level contract. Zonnon has put up 46 points in 35 games for the Blainville-Boisbriand Armada of the QMJHL.

— Shea missed the game with an upper-body injury. He got hit in the face during the second period Saturday against Winnipeg and

went back to the locker room. He briefly skated out to start the third period with a full face shield on his helmet but never reentered the game.

Penguins coach Dan Muse designated Shea as day-to-day. Graves played his first NHL game since Jan. 21 in Shea's absence.

Up next

The Penguins complete a three-game homestand 7 p.m. ET Tuesday against the top team in the NHL, the Colorado Avalanche.

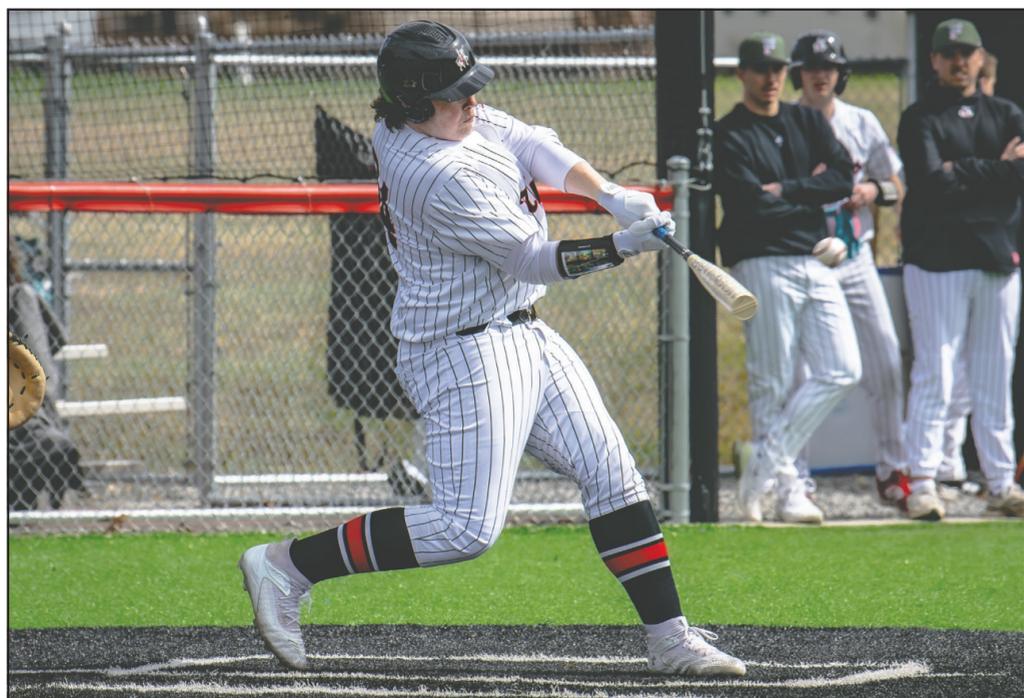


Photo by Christy Fackler

Franklin's Jack Wimer delivers on one of his three hits in a season-opening win against Seneca on Saturday afternoon in non-region baseball action at the high school field.

► Knights

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The Knights came up empty at the plate in the home half of the second, but the Bobcats weren't able to gain any headway in the top of the third as Cassano retired the side after allowing a one-out walk.

Franklin was able to put the game away early as they nearly batted around twice in the third inning, plating 14 runs on nine hits while also taking advantage of two errors and four walks.

Ian Higley led off the third with a double and Fezell followed with another double to plate Higley. Af-

ter a groundout, Jack Wimer singled and stole second before Fezell scored following an error on a ball hit by Nolan Parry for a 4-0 advantage. Darius Cassano then walked to load the bases.

Damian Cassano brought home a run with a walk and Brice Schermerhorn knocked in two more runs with a double. Brandt McAfoose followed with a run-scoring single to put the score at 8-0 before Higley walked to re-load the bases.

Fezell continued his stellar day with a bases-clearing triple before scoring on a wild pitch for a 12-0 lead. Marsteller got the momentum going again with a double and Wimer brought him home with a single. An error and a fielder's

choice grounder hit by Darius Cassano scored the 14th run before Schermerhorn closed the game with a two-run single.

Fezell finished with six strikeouts and two walks on the mound while he went 3 for 3 at the plate with three extra-base hits, three runs scored and four RBIs. Wimer also had a three-hit day and two RBIs, Schermerhorn belted two hits and drove in four runs while Marsteller added two hits and an RBI.

Franklin is scheduled to play three road games this week starting with a non-region matchup at Cochranton today. The Knights are also to visit Reynolds on Wednesday and Rocky Grove on Friday.

THE DAILY SCOREBOARD

SCHOLASTIC BOXSCORES

BASEBALL
SENECA (0)
Fisher (ss) 1 0 0, Farrell (p) 2 0 0, Campbell (3b) 2 0 0, Mack (1b) 0 0 0, Jewell (c) 1 0 0, Szymanski (2b) 0 0 0, Monroe (cf) 1 0 0, Flook (lf) 1 0 0, Orton (cf) 1 0 0. Totals: 9 0 0.

FRANKLIN (16)
Higley (2b) 2 2 1, Fezell (p) 3 3 3, Marsteller (c) 3 0 2, Wilmoth (cr) 0 2 0, Wimer (1b) 3 2 3, Parry (3b) 3 2 0, Dar. Cassano (rf) 2 2 0, Dam. Cassano (ss) 1 1 0, Schermerhorn (cf) 3 1 2, McAfoose (lf) 2 1 1. Totals: 22 16 12.

Score by Quarters

Seneca	000	—	0
Franklin	20(14)	—	16

2B — Franklin (Fezell 2, Higley, Marsteller, Wimer, Schermerhorn).
3B — Franklin (Fezell, Marsteller).
RBIs — Franklin (Fezell 4, Schermerhorn 4, Wimer 2, Marsteller, Parry, Dar. Cassano, Dam. Cassano, McAfoose).
SB — Seneca (Fisher 2), Franklin (Fezell, Wimer, McAfoose).

SOFTBALL
CRANBERRY (18)
Hess (p) 4 3 2, Coe (ss) 4 4 3, Scarbrough (rf) 3 1 2, Stewart (1b) 3 2 2, Em. Morrow (3b) 4 0 2, McWilliams (lf) 4 2 1, Shumaker (c) 3 3 3, El. Morrow (rf) 1 0 0, Godette (2b) 1 0 0, Smith (ph) 1 1 1, Wenner (2b) 1 1 1, Schneider (2b) 2 1 1, Feroz (cf) 0 0 0. Totals: 31 18 18.

FRANKLIN (0)
Goodman (ss) 1 0 0, Hollerman (2b) 2 0 0, Swartz (p) 2 0 0, Rial (cf) 2 0 0, Shingledecker (c) 2 0 1, Graham (1b) 2 0 1, Eakin (lf) 1 0 0, Davenstizer (3b) 1 0 0, Carr (rf) 1 0 0. Totals: 14 0 2.

Score by Innings

Cranberry	194	4	—	18
Franklin	000	0	—	0

2B — Cranberry (Coe 2, Em. Morrow, Smith), Franklin (Graham).
3B — Cranberry (Em. Morrow, SAhumaker, Scarbrough).
HR — Cranberry (Stewart, Scarbrough).

ANNOUNCEMENT

FLY CASTING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
The 6th Annual Fly Casting Skills Development workshop will be held on five Saturdays from May through September at Cranberry High School. The workshop will be held on May 16, June 20, July 18, August 15 and September 19 from 9 a.m. to noon each day.

The fee is \$10 cash for participants ages 12-17 and \$20 cash for those ages 18 and older. Ages 12-17 must be accompanied by an adult. Pre-registration is greatly appreciated prior to start date.

Fly casting instruction will be by FFI master certified casting instructor Gary Kell and FFI certified instructors Bob Anderson, Jack Barr and Chase Howard.

The workshop will utilize the Fly Fishers International Fly Casting Skills Development Program (FCSD). The mission of the FCSD is to give all anglers a guide to learning and improving their casting skills that address increasingly advanced fishing situations.

The workshop will start at the Foundation Level, which is for true beginners of the sport who might be picking up a fly rod for the first time. Fly rod outfits are provided for beginners to use.

The workshop will progress through four levels: Foundation, Bronze, Silver and Gold. These levels provide a broad, relevant range of fishing casts covering a number of skills to better your fishing opportunities.

For more information, contact us at keystoneflyfishers1@gmail.com or call 814-673-5478. The FCSD program can be searched for on the FFI website.

SPORTS SCENE

MONDAY, MARCH 23

SCHOLASTIC BASEBALL
Franklin at Cochranton (4 p.m.)
Oil City at North Clarion (4 p.m.)
Sharpville at Rocky Grove (4 p.m.)
Cranberry at Union City (4 p.m.)
Titusville at Cory (4:30 p.m.)

SCHOLASTIC SOFTBALL
Rocky Grove at Franklin (4:30 p.m.)
A-C Valley/Union at West Middlesex (4 p.m.)

BOYS VOLLEYBALL
Mercyhurst Prep at Rocky Grove (6 p.m.)

BOYS TENNIS
Erie High at Titusville (3:30 p.m.)

TUESDAY, MARCH 24

SCHOLASTIC SOFTBALL
Girard at Oil City (4 p.m.)
Crabery vs. St. Marys at DuBois (4:15 p.m.)
Seneca at Titusville (4 p.m.)

SCHOLASTIC TRACK
North Clarion at Brookville (3:45 p.m.)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25

SCHOLASTIC BASEBALL
Franklin at Reynolds (4 p.m.)
Erie High at Oil City (4 p.m.)
Cranberry at Cambridge Springs (4 p.m.)

SCHOLASTIC SOFTBALL
Eisenhower at Rocky Grove (4 p.m.)

SCHOLASTIC TRACK
Cranberry, Kams City at Clarion-Limestone (3:45 p.m.)
Redbank Valley at Keystone (3:45 p.m.)

BOYS VOLLEYBALL
Rocky Grove at Maplewood (6 p.m.)

THURSDAY, MARCH 26

SCHOLASTIC BASEBALL
Seneca at Titusville (4 p.m.)
Clarion-Limestone at A-C Valley/Union (4 p.m.)

SCHOLASTIC SOFTBALL
Franklin at Sharon (4:30 p.m.)
Hickory at Oil City (4 p.m.)
Harbor Creek at Titusville (4 p.m.)
Central Clarion at A-C Valley/Union (4 p.m.)

SCHOLASTIC TRACK
Union/A-C Valley at Monticau (4 p.m.)
Redbank Valley at Armstrong (3:30 p.m.)

FRIDAY, MARCH 27

SCHOLASTIC BASEBALL
Franklin at Rocky Grove (4 p.m.)
Eisenhower at Titusville (4 p.m.)

SCHOLASTIC SOFTBALL
Forest Area at Rocky Grove (4 p.m.)

TRACK & FIELD
Oil City, Franklin at West Middlesex Duals (9 a.m.)

SATURDAY, MARCH 28

SCHOLASTIC BASEBALL
A-C Valley/Union at Reynolds (4 p.m.)

SCHOLASTIC SOFTBALL
Warren at Franklin (noon)
Titusville at Girard (noon)
A-C Valley/Union at Reynolds (4 p.m.)

MONDAY, MARCH 30

SCHOLASTIC BASEBALL
Franklin at Slippery Rock (4 p.m.)
Grove City at Oil City (4 p.m.)
Rocky Grove at Cambridge Springs (4 p.m.)
Sharon at Titusville (4 p.m.)

SCHOLASTIC SOFTBALL
Titusville at Eisenhower (4 p.m.)

BOYS TENNIS
Oil City at Greenville (3:30 p.m.)

BOYS VOLLEYBALL
Rocky Grove at Cambridge Springs (6 p.m.)