Dear Family and Friends of Santa Margarita Baseball,

We are excited for the 2020 Spring Baseball Season. Coming off our 2019 CIF Championship, our student-athletes have worked relentlessly over the past nine months in preparation for 2020 and to continue to push the program to new heights. We hope to produce a memorable and exciting experience for players, parents, and fans.

Our mission is to create and empower successful young men of character through the sport of baseball. We believe baseball has a unique ability to mirror life in so many ways, from the commitment to the daily process, to the highs and lows of each day, to the relationships built on and within the team. We strive to cultivate a competitive atmosphere that encourages players to grow on and off the field.

We want to thank you for supporting our Eagle baseball program. The Eagle baseball family would not be possible without your generous gifts of time, money and care that truly makes for a special community. We look forward to having you and our student-athletes as a part of our Eagle baseball family for years to come.

VARSITY HEAD COACH
Chris Malec

Santa Margarita alumnus Chris Malec ’01 enters his third season as the head coach of Eagle Baseball. Chris took over as head coach in December of 2017. The Eagles have gone 39 - 29 in Coach Malec’s two seasons with the program, including 26-11 in his second season. Malec was named the CIF Coach of the Year during the 2019 campaign, in addition to being selected as a Coach of Character by the Orange County Athletic Director’s Association.

Before coming to Santa Margarita, Malec was the associate head coach and an associate faculty member at Saddleback College from 2012 to 2015. Malec primarily worked as the infield coach and hitting coach in addition to running the offense. During his time coaching the Gauchos, he saw 41 of his players move on to four-year schools. All three of the shortstops Malec coached at Saddleback moved on to four-year schools and eventually, professional baseball (Josh Fuentes - Rockies, Colby Schultz - Royals, Luke Jarvis - Marlins). The Gauchos made the playoffs three of four years during Malec’s tenure, advancing to the super regionals twice.

While coaching at Saddleback College, Malec founded the Saddleback Cowboys Baseball Club in 2014, a developmental baseball program for youth athletes ranging from 11-17 years old. The Cowboys have grown into a nationally-recognized program, both for their tournament success and ability to assist players with advancing to the next level. In all, the Cowboys have had over 60 players graduate and move on to four-year schools in their short four years. The Cowboys have placed in the top four in numerous age groups at the USA National Team Championships several different times.

As a player, Malec earned All-Serra League honors three straight seasons at Santa Margarita, and was selected to the All-Orange County Team. Malec attended UC Santa Barbara where he was selected as a freshman All-American. By the time Malec finished his college career, he added three All-Big West selections to his resume and a Baseball America Summer All-American for his performance for the YD Red Sox in the Cape Cod League, where he was also named an All-Star.

Malec gained national attention when he was diagnosed with cancer during his senior season. After missing four weeks undergoing surgery and chemotherapy treatments, Malec returned to action against Long Beach State hitting a grand slam in his first at-bat and first start back. Malec continued treatments through the season while continuing to play. He has been in remission since the summer of 2005.

Malec began his professional career in 2005 when he was drafted by the New York Yankees, reaching as high as Class AAA. He was a three-time league champion and a 2008 All-Star. Malec retired from professional baseball after the 2010 season. Malec was recognized by Baseball America as the player with “The Best Plate Discipline.”

Malec resides in Rancho Santa Margarita with his wife Caitlin, a teacher at Santa Margarita, and their two children, Tomás (5) and Colin (3).
COACHING STAFF

VARSITY PITCHING COACH & PITCHING COORDINATOR
Willie Kuhl

Coach Willie Kuhl is entering his second season as the varsity pitching coach for the Eagles. Willie pitched for four seasons at Cal State Fullerton. In his four years, Kuhl compiled a 6-6 record with two saves, a 3.13 career ERA (team leading 1.37 ERA in 2014) and 137 strikeouts in 110.0 career innings (11.01 K/9). Kuhl also ranks ninth in all-time appearances at CSF (87). He was part of four postseason teams, including two trips to the Super Regionals and one College World Series trip (2015).

After finishing his playing career at CSF, Kuhl began his coaching career at Mission Viejo High School (2016) before moving on to become the pitching coach at Fullerton College (2017-2018). In two full seasons as the Hornets pitching coach, Fullerton had four All-Conference pitchers and multiple pitchers sign on to four-year schools. In 2018, The Hornets finished in the top three for conference ERA and walks allowed. In just their second year under Coach Kuhl, The Hornets pitching staff performed better in all major statistical categories by lowering their H/9, BB/9, ERA and increasing their K/9.

Kuhl also serves as a contract substitute teacher at SMCHS, helping to cover many different subjects throughout the year. Willie and his wife Jessica currently reside in Laguna Hills.

VARSITY HITTING COACH & 3RD BASE COACH
Seth Melton

Coach Downey is a northwest native who played four years of varsity basketball. Coach Downey’s first year was at Heritage High School (2009) in Vancouver, Wash. where his team won their first district title in school history. He then transferred to Timberline High School (2010-2012) in Boise, Idaho for this last three years as a starter and two-time All-SIC League member. Coach Downey played two years of college basketball - one year at Spokane Community College and one year at Spokane Community College (2012-2013) under coach Jeremy Growth where the team took third place in the NWAC and then his last year at Walla Walla Community College (2015-2016) under Jeff Reinland. Coach Downey is currently a manager at the Ladera Sports Center in Ladera Ranch, a basketball and volleyball training facility that hosts tournaments and home for AAU teams.

Barreras began coaching about 10 years ago and has become a highly successful travel baseball coach in Orange County. His teams have competed mostly in the 12U-16U age groups and have won multiple league and tournament championships in Nevada, Arizona and California. In addition, Barreras has served on the coaching staff at Woodbridge High School in Irvine. Barreras now makes his home in Rancho Santa Margarita with his wife Mahsa and their two wonderful children.
Coach Wade Jackson is from Lake Forest where he played football and baseball at El Toro High School. He was a two-year varsity letterman in football and baseball. Jackson earned All-South Coast League honors two years in a row for each sport. Jackson attended Saddleback College where he was selected All-Orange Empire Conference two years in a row and elected to the Saddleback Hall of Fame. Jackson went on to attend the University of Nevada Reno where he earned Big West honors two years in a row. He was then drafted by the Anaheim Angels where he played in the minor league system for two years before hanging up his cleats.

After Jackson’s playing days, he jumped into coaching teaching young boys to play the game at the highest level. He has managed at the travel ball level for 20 plus years. He also coached at El Toro High School at the varsity and JV levels for three years. Jackson spent five years running teams for BPA coaching teams to National Championships and Perfect Game champions. Jackson now co-runs the Saddleback Cowboys Baseball Organization where they have quickly established themselves as a nationally-recognized organization competing at the highest level.

Coach Downey is in his first year as the senior varsity head coach. Prior to joining the Eagle family, he served as a varsity assistant at Mission Viejo High School from 2007-2016. He is in his fourth year as an educator and third year at Santa Margarita, where he teaches geometry and algebra 2. Coach Downey graduated from National University in San Diego, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Business Marketing. After graduating from National University, he attended La Sierra University and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Business Marketing. Coach Downey currently lives in Foothill Ranch with his wife Kristen and son Luke (2). Along with baseball, he enjoys playing golf and spending time with his family.

Coach Jason “JJ” Navarro is entering his first year as the varsity pitching coach for the Eagles. Navarro played for the travel ball organization ABD under the late Mike Speirs. In 2007, Navarro was chosen to play for a national travel organization where he had the opportunity to play in Puerto Rico against some of the best young talent on the island.

He went on to play college baseball at Lon Morris College in east Texas. When Jason was fifteen years old he met Tom House and the National Pitching Association, which is a research-based training facility for rotational athletes. Over the last 12 years, Navarro has assisted in working with and next to many elite Major League pitchers and a number of NFL quarterbacks such as Ian Kennedy, Cole Hamels, Barry Zito, Tim Tebow, Matt Barkley and many more, as well as the “Million Dollar Arm” competition winners Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel. Navarro is also in his third year of coaching with the Saddleback Cowboys who have gained national recognition after being established only five years ago.
COACHING STAFF

FRESHMAN HEAD COACH
Michael Willett

Coach Willett is entering his 10th year of coaching baseball at SMCHS, where he has multiple Trinity League championships to his credit at the JV and freshman levels. Coach Willett has coached every level in the program, his leadership instrumental in preparing younger players for success at the varsity level.

Willett has been coaching youth, club and high school baseball in Orange County for over 25 years. He has been a member of the American Baseball Coaching Association for 17 Years. Several of Coach Willett’s former players have gone on to play baseball at the college and professional levels. Coach Willett played college baseball at Mount San Antonio College as well as football and baseball at Pomona High School. Willett earned his Bachelor of Arts in Business from the University of Redlands.

Mike and his wife Beth have been a part of the Santa Margarita Eagle family for many years. All three of their children and their son-in-law are SMCHS graduates (Megan and Jordan class of 2003, Kyle ’07 and Troy ’10). Mike and Beth will celebrate their 36th wedding anniversary this year and have resided in Mission Viejo for 32 years.

FRESHMAN ASSISTANT COACH
Patrick Visconti

Coach Visconti is in his second year of coaching baseball at SMCHS. He is a Santa Margarita baseball alumnus from the class of 2006 and Santa Margarita’s director of campus ministry. Visconti played throughout high school, and after receiving a few opportunities to play D-1 collegiate baseball, decided to pursue a career in education/ministry. He credits his love for the game and excitement for coaching from his experience of playing alongside several future major leaguers and from coaching in the Challenger Baseball League, a league for kids ages 5-20 with developmental disabilities.

FROSH/SOPH HEAD COACH
Nick Cappuccilli

Coach Cappuccilli is an Orange County native who played four successful seasons for Edison High School, where he was named team captain for three different seasons. Cappuccilli went on to play collegiate ball at the University of Northern Colorado, Golden West College and Dakota Wesleyan University, again being honored as team captain in two of his college seasons. Additionally, he played in multiple collegiate summer leagues in the U.S. and Canada.

Coach Cappuccilli studied Spanish and psychology on his way to a bachelor’s degree and received his master’s in 2012. Coach Cappuccilli traveled to Europe to compete in the European professional baseball league, as well as coach youth players and coaches to introduce and expand baseball in various European countries. In 2014, he traveled to Vladivostok, Russia and Santiago, Dominican Republic where he conducted clinics for local coaches and players. In 2015, he travelled to Shanghai, China to work with Major League Baseball in their player development department in order to promote Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean baseball players to the major leagues. He later returned to Russia as part of a baseball development and expansion project, where he conducted clinics and demonstrations for over 250 youth athletes and coaches.