

Chris Malec - Head Coach

Santa Margarita alumnus Chris Malec (01') enters his fourth season as the head coach of Eagles Baseball. Malec was appointed head coach in December 2017. He has a career record of 42-36 in three seasons with the Eagles.

In 2019, Malec's second season at the helm, the Eagles went 26-11 and won the CIF Southern Section Division 2 championship. Malec was chosen Division 2 Coach of the Year and a "Coach of Character" by the Orange County Athletic Director's Assn.

Before coming to Santa Margarita, Malec was Associate Head Coach / Associate Faculty at Saddleback College from 2012-15. He primarily worked as the infield coach and hitting coach in addition to running the Gauchos' offense. While at Saddleback, 41 of Malec's players moved on to play at four-year universities. The three starting shortstops he coached all matriculated to four-year schools and, eventually, professional baseball -- Josh Fuentes with the Colorado Rockies, Colby Schultz with the Kansas City Royals and Luke Jarvis with the Miami Marlins. The Gauchos made the playoffs in three of Malec's four seasons, advancing to Super Regionals twice.

In 2014, while coaching at Saddleback College, Malec founded the Saddleback Cowboys Baseball Club, a developmental youth (ages 11-17) baseball program. The Cowboys have grown into a nationally recognized organization, both for their tournament success and ability to assist players in moving to the next level. More than 60 former Cowboys have gone on to play at four-year universities and the program has placed in the top four at the USA National Team Championships numerous times at different age-group levels.

As a player at Santa Margarita, Malec earned All-Serra League honors three consecutive seasons and was selected to the All-Orange County team. He then attended UC Santa Barbara, where he became a Freshman All-American. By the time Malec finished his college career, he was a three-time All-Big West Conference selection. He had also been chosen by Baseball America as a Summer All-American for his performance with the Yarmouth-Dennis Red Sox in the prestigious Cape Cod League, where he was an All Star.

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

Malec began his professional career in 2005, after being drafted in the 16th round of the Major League Baseball draft by the New York Yankees. During his minor-league career, his teams won three league championships, he was a 2008 Eastern League (Double-A) All Star and he reached as high as the Triple-A level, one step from the major leagues. Malec had more career walks than strikeouts when he retired from professional baseball after the 2010 season, one reason he was once recognized by Baseball America as the minor leaguer with "The Best Plate Discipline."

Malec resides in Santa Margarita with his wife Caitlin, a teacher at Santa Margarita Catholic High School, and their children, Tomás (6), Colin (4), Emilia (6 Months).

Malec in the media:

- “Malec’s Dreams Become a Reality” ESPN http://www.espn.com/mlb/columns/story?columnist=crasnick_jerry&id=2084487
- “Malec’s Return Inspires Gauchos” ESPN <http://www.espn.com.au/college-sports/news/story?id=2056624>
- Jim Rome Show - Featured Guest June 2005
- New York Times “Beating Cancer Bonds Two Ballplayers” <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/27/sports/baseball/27curtis.html>
- “UCSB Celebrate Chris Malec Day “ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McDVgCgN9Ag>
- <http://www.ucsbgauchos.com/sports/m-basebl/2014-15/releases/2015012660r72r>
- Santa Barbara News Press “Malec’s Return Sparks UCSB” - <http://newspress.com/Top/Article/article.jsp?Section=ARCHIVESW&ID=564449271475208209&Archive=true>

Willie Kuhl – Associate Head Coach | Pitching Coordinator

Coach Willie Kuhl is entering his third season as varsity pitching coach. In his debut season at Santa Margarita, he helped guide the Eagles to the 2019 CIF Southern Section Division 2 championship. The Eagles posted a 2.31 earned-run average in 2019 and had a 1.83 ERA in the pandemic-shortened 2020 season.

In 2019, Eagles pitcher Alex Schrier was first-team all-Trinity League and Spencer Edwards and Matthew McClure were second-team selections. McClure was second-team All-CIF.

Kuhl began his coaching career in 2016 at his alma mater, Mission Viejo High, before becoming pitching coach at Fullerton College from 2017-18. In his two seasons at Fullerton, he guided the careers of four all-conference pitchers and had several earn scholarships to four-year universities. In 2018, the Hornets pitching staff finished in the top three of the Orange Empire Conference in ERA and (fewest) walks allowed. In his second season, Hornets pitchers lowered their ERA and averages for hits and walks per nine innings while increasing their strikeouts per nine innings.

As a player, Kuhl in 2011 helped Mission Viejo High win its first CIF Southern Section Division 2 championship. He got the win in the title game, giving him 22 in his career, which at the time established a school record.

Kuhl then pitched four years for Cal State Fullerton, helping the Titans reach the NCAA playoffs each season, advance to a pair of Super Regionals, and make a College World Series appearance in 2015. Kuhl’s 87 career appearances ranks ninth in the Titans’ storied history, and his 1.37 ERA in 2014 led the team. In his career, Kuhl posted a 6-6 record with two saves, 137 strikeouts in 110 innings (11.01 strikeouts per nine innings) and a 3.13 ERA.

Kuhl teaches IB Business Management at Santa Margarita. He and his wife JD reside in Lake Forest.

Seth Melton - Varsity Hitting Coach | 3rd Base Coach

Coach Seth Melton's fourth season as a coach for Santa Margarita will be his 22nd coaching varsity baseball. He spent the first 17 years of his coaching career in Arizona, 10 years as a head coach.

Melton played at Glendale (Ariz.) Community College and New Mexico Highlands University. The Glendale team he played for in 1994 won the Arizona Community College Athletic Conference and advanced to the JUCO World Series. While at New Mexico Highlands, Melton in 1998 was first-team All-Rocky Mountain Conference and a third-team All-American selection after leading his team with a .428 batting average and 14 home runs.

Melton began his coaching career in 1999 with the Lake Havasu High junior varsity before becoming the varsity coach at his alma mater, Mingus Union High, in 2002. From 2003-2005, Mingus won consecutive conference titles, and Melton was the league's coach of the year in 2003 and 2004.

After the 2005 season, Melton took over the varsity at Thunderbird High in Phoenix, where in seven seasons his teams won 194 games and advanced to the postseason five times, winning conference championships in 2010 and 2011. He was the league's coach of the year three times, including 2010, when he was chosen the Arizona High School Baseball Coach of the Year, and 2011, when his team advanced to the state championship game. From 2013-16, Melton was an assistant at Greenway High in Phoenix for teams that won four conference championships and state championships in 2014 and 2016. Melton also coached at Mountain Pointe High in Phoenix, in 2017.

Melton teaches Social Studies at Santa Margarita. He and his wife Brande reside in San Clemente. They have been married for 20 years and have two children: Tyler (19) and Paige (15).

Oscar Barreras - Varsity Outfield Coach | Hitting Coach

Coach Barreras is entering his fourth season as varsity assistant at Santa Margarita, working primarily with the outfielders and hitters.

Barreras played at Chaffey College, where he received his Associate in Arts degree. He then continued his education and playing career at Cal State San Bernardino, where he earned a Bachelor's Degree in Business.

A power-hitting corner infielder and outfielder, Barreras has traveled the United States, Mexico and Canada to play baseball. He shares those experiences with his players, encouraging and preparing them to take advantage of the educational and playing opportunities that baseball can provide.

Barreras has been a highly successful club coach in Orange County. His teams have competed primarily 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 in Irvine.

Barreras resides in Rancho Santa Margarita with his wife, Mahsa, and two children.

Coach Jason "JJ" Navarro - Assistant Coach

Coach Navarro is entering his fourth year as an assistant coach for the Eagles.

Navarro played for the travel ball organization ABD under the late Mike Speirs. In 2007, he 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. Navarro went on to play baseball at Lon Morris College in East Texas.

When Navarro was 15, he met throwing guru Tom House and became associated with the National Pitching Association, a research-based training facility.

Over the last 14 years, Navarro has assisted in working with and next to talent such as Major League pitchers Ian Kennedy, Cole Hamels and Barry Zito, quarterbacks Tim Tebow and Matt Barkley, and “Million Dollar Arm” competition winners Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel.

Coach Michael Willett – Junior Varsity Head Coach

Coach Willett is entering his 12th year of coaching baseball at SMCHS, where he has multiple Trinity League Championships to his credit at the junior varsity and freshman levels. Willett has coached at every level in the Eagles’ program, and his leadership has been instrumental in preparing the younger players for success at the varsity level.

Willett has coached youth, club and high school baseball in Orange County for 28 years and has been a member of the American Baseball Coaching Association for 20 Years. Several of Willett’s former players have gone on to play baseball at the college and professional levels.

Willett played baseball at Mount San Antonio College as well as football and baseball at Pomona High. He earned his Bachelor’s Degree in Business from the University of Redlands.

Willett and his wife, Beth, will celebrate their 39th wedding anniversary this year. They have resided in Mission Viejo for 35 years and have been a part of the Santa Margarita Eagles family for more than two decades. Their three children and their son-in-law are SMCHS graduates: Megan and Jordan in the Class of 2003, Kyle ‘07 and Troy ‘10.

Coach Mike Hiserman – Junior Varsity Coach

Coach Hiserman is entering his first season with the SMCHS baseball program. He has coached high-level youth and club teams in Ventura and Orange Counties, and recently completed a 38-year career with the Los Angeles Times, where he won several writing and editing awards and rose to Sports Editor.

Hiserman helped found the SoCal Rebels club team, a group that advanced to the AAU national championship game in its first season. More recently, he was an assistant coach with a Rebels group that included the No. 1 overall pick in 2016 MLB draft and three more taken in the first 70 picks of the 2017 draft.

Hiserman played football and baseball at Kennedy High in La Palma. His sons, Stephen and Matthew, graduated from Capistrano Valley High. Stephen is a veteran of the Los Angeles Fire Department. Matt played on four South Coast League championship teams at Capo before pitching for one season for Santa Clara and three for the University of San Francisco. He has been an assistant for one season at CSUN and was pitching coach for four at USF.

Hiserman and wife Ronnie will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary in 2021. They reside in Mission Viejo.

Coach Ryan Crowe - Swing Coach

Coach Crowe is entering his first season with the SMCHS baseball program. He has most recently served (2020) as an Assistant Baseball Coach at the BIOLA, a perennial Division II nationally ranked program. Coach Crowe, has also been on staff coaching football at San Juan Hills HS for the past 5 season, helping build the program into the 2019 CIF Champions,

A two sport athlete himself, Ryan graduated from San Juan Hills in 2012 after leading the baseball program to its first playoff appearance in program history. He started his college career at Santa Barbara City College before winning a Gold Glove at Westmont College as a catcher and receiving All American honors in the NAIA. He finished his college career at Hope International after winning a GSAC championship in 2019.

Coach Jim Allison – Freshman Head Coach

Coach Allison is an Orange County native who has coached at the high school and youth levels for more than 20 years.

Most recently, Allison was a member of the Santa Margarita High softball program’s coaching staff. He was a varsity assistant for two seasons and the junior varsity head coach for one. Before that, Allison was the JV head coach for softball Aliso Viejo High, where his team won a league championship with a 20-6 record.

However, baseball is Allison’s first love. He played the game through the age of 19, including briefly as a “walk-on” pitcher at Long Beach State. Allison also has 10 years of experience umpiring at several levels, including collegiate baseball.

Allison and wife Liz reside in Laguna Hills. Their daughters are both graduates of SMCHS: Emily in 2017; Madeline in ‘19.

Coach Patrick Visconti - Freshman Assistant Coach

Coach Visconti is in his third year of coaching baseball at Santa Margarita, where he serves as the Director of Campus Ministry. He is a 2006 graduate of SMCHS and an alumnus of the baseball program.

Visconti had a few opportunities to play Division I baseball but decided to pursue a career in education/ministry. He credits his love for the game and excitement for coaching to his experience playing alongside several future pros, and from coaching in the Challenger Baseball League, an organization for players 5-20 with developmental disabilities.

Visconti earned his Bachelor’s Degree from the University of San Francisco and a Masters Degree in Theological Studies from Loyola Marymount. Before returning to Santa Margarita, Visconti was the Campus Minister for Regional Service at LMU. Before that, he taught for six years at Servite High.

Visconti and his wife, Maria, who is also a 2006 SMCHS graduate, reside in Rancho Santa Margarita with their son Rocco, 4, and daughter, Stella, 2.