



CALIFORNIA
HIGH SCHOOL

KORY STEPHENS

HEAD IN THE GAME, FEET ON THE GROUND

By Lisa Kaitlyn | Photos by Kiley Hartzler

Imagine you're on the field. Dust swirls around your feet and fans call out from the stands. You step up to the plate. Now focus. Watch the ball leave the pitcher's hand and stare it down as it hurls toward you for a fraction of a second. Know that you are attempting the near impossible, to swing the bat and make contact with leather that's less than three inches diameter, whirling at you faster than the speed limit on the highway. Don't blink. Take a breath. Now swing.

California senior Kory Stephens knows as well as anyone, baseball is a sport full of more failures than successes. The shortstop reminds himself and his teammates of this when they miss one of those swings. He shared, "It's hard to stay up because there's a lot that can go wrong. So I usually try to just remind them of that. Tell them it's not an easy sport. You fail more than you succeed." Remembering that the game Kory and his teammates signed up for is not an easy one, makes strikeouts easier to swallow and home runs that much sweeter.

So what is Kory thinking about when he approaches the plate? "I really just focus on trying not to be intimidated. Then just seeing it and hitting it as well as I can." Kory has been playing baseball as long as he can remember, starting at five-years-old with t-ball. He said, "I've played every year, including now—all summer, all spring, and fall." His draw to the sport; the physical and mental skills it takes to be good. He likes playing the shortstop position because it is the most active position on the field.

Kory's favorite thing about attending California High School is the community it fosters. He said, "I like that it's a small school. Everyone knows each other and usually likes each other." His proudest moment in his high school career was representing his small school as the baseball team faced long-time rival Blair Oaks, his sophomore year. He recalled Blair Oaks had a particularly strong team that year and the California Pintos were struggling. No one expected the outcome. Kory shared, "They

"THEY WEREN'T EXPECTING US TO BEAT THEM AND WE BEAT THEM ON THEIR FIELD ON THEIR SENIOR NIGHT IN THE GAME RIGHT BEFORE DISTRICTS. IT GAVE US A LOT OF MOMENTUM TO GO INTO OUR DISTRICTS."

weren't expecting us to beat them and we beat them on their field on their senior night in the game right before districts. It gave us a lot of momentum to go into our districts."

Kory's dad is one of his biggest influencers. He shared that his father has taught him never to get down on himself, always play as hard as he can, and not worry about what others think. When he is not on

the field, you can find Kory in the garage with his dad fixing up a 1970 Camaro—Kory's dad's first car. In the summers, he and his cousin operate a lawn mowing business. Kory plans to take his entrepreneur sense with him to college, with his eye currently set on a business degree. Though he has not decided where he will attend, Kory plans on continuing his baseball career at the collegiate level.

