

## **Benedetti Takes Hill One Last Time for EV Before Heading to Pullman**

YAKIMA, Wash. -- When Riley Benedetti last pitched he was flawless. Two starts in regional and state games produced 14 consecutive goose eggs, 23 strikeouts and a deeper run for East Valley's exceedingly young team.

In the midst of a run like that, all Benedetti wanted to do was keep pitching. Thanks to this weekend's All-State Baseball Series, he'll get that chance.

The Washington State University-bound CWAC co-MVP will join two other local standout pitchers — Ellensburg's Garrett Hull and Riverside Christian's Jacob Haas — in the annual four-game series that will draw 72 of the state's best seniors to Parker Faller Field on Saturday and Sunday.

Normally a part of the rotation for the Yakima Pepsi Beetles in the summer, Benedetti will instead depart soon for Pullman to get a jump on conditioning and classes at WSU.

"I will miss summer ball for sure, but this will give me a chance to get used to the program, hit the weights and take some credits," he said on Wednesday after receiving the athlete of the year award for baseball at the Yakima Valley Sports Awards. "It's a big step up and I know I have to continue to work hard. There's no slacking off or someone will take your place."

Work ethic is what created his stellar senior season, which included a 7-2 record on the mound with 96 strikeouts over 66 innings and a .390 batting average.

That, and a healthy dose of perseverance.

After a sophomore season earned him first-team CWAC honors, Benedetti struggled last year with elbow tendonitis and a growth spurt that saw him gain three inches to 6-foot-3.

"I missed about three weeks in the season and then I struggled with accuracy for a while," he said. "It was a slow process and the worst of it was resting and not doing anything. I felt better toward the end of the season, but during the summer (with the Beetles) I was still a little out of it. I tried to be patient but that's not easy."

So when the Beetles' season came to an end, Benedetti made a vow to himself.

"I promised myself to not touch a baseball for three months," he said. "All I wanted was to get healthy and feel strong again."

His wish came true this spring. In addition to his impressive numbers, Benedetti's leadership and reliable production — both as a pitcher and shortstop — guided the Red Devils to 18 wins and a run that didn't end until a 1-0 loss to Selah in the state quarterfinal. Of EV's eight all-league players, four were sophomores and another was a first-team freshman.

"We had a majority of underclassmen but that was a challenge I looked forward to because I knew we had some incredible athletes coming up," Benedetti said. "I remember before the season people wondering, because we'd be so young, if we got that No. 5 or 6 seed for district how would we get by that first game? We had all kinds of guys step up and that sure helped me. Confidence comes from your team and they gave me that."

With a recent coaching change at Washington State, where Marty Lees was hired to replace Donnie Marbut earlier this month, Benedetti is unsure if his first year in Pullman will be as a redshirt athlete. But he'll be prepared for anything.

“Honestly right now I have no idea whether I’ll redshirt or not,” said Benedetti, who accepted Marbut’s scholarship offer a year ago. “Originally, before the coaching change, I was told there was a possibility I might play quite a bit the first year. But I’ll just have to wait and see. I have great faith in Marty Lees because he has a strong reputation. I’m excited to get to Pullman and get started.”