

Diekroeger Duo

By Joseph Beyda, Stanford Daily

The Diekroeger brothers, junior Kenny and sophomore Danny, hope to rebound from forgettable 2011 seasons and help to lead the No. 2 Cardinal to its first College World Series since 2008. (IAN GARCIA-DOTY/The Stanford Daily)

Stanford has benefited from its fair share of sisterly love recently, with the Ogwumikes dominating the hardwood, the up-and-coming Payne sisters emerging on the soccer pitch and the pitcher-catcher combination of the Cardinal's two Gerhart triplets ready to kick off another softball season.

But with baseball season just over a week away, it's a pair of brothers that could help take the No. 2 Stanford baseball team to its next national title.

The Diekroeger brothers—junior shortstop Kenny and sophomore infielder Danny—are both hoping to rebound from somewhat underwhelming 2011 seasons. Kenny Diekroeger saw his batting average fall 60 points after a first-team All-Pac-10 performance in 2010 that also earned him Freshman All-America honors. Danny Diekroeger, on the other hand, playing sparingly behind other members of the Cardinal's top-ranked freshman class and appeared in only 19 games.

With a top-10 group of recruits coming in for the third straight year, Danny Diekroeger has kept his nose to the grindstone over the offseason.

"You can't worry about it because there's nothing you can do other than work hard," he said. "Positions might open up, and you just can never predict stuff like that. It's awesome to have so much experience on the team, but that also makes it harder to crack the lineup, I guess. But it doesn't change my approach."

His development included a summer stint with Morehead City of the Coastal Plain League, where he made 39 starts and was fourth on the Marlins in batting average.

Kenny Diekroeger, meanwhile, has also been getting used to his increasing role as a leader on the team after the graduation of catcher Zach Jones—especially as the only starting upperclassman position player from the squad a year ago.

"Our class has really been able to help the freshmen and sophomores get acclimated to Pac-12 baseball," Kenny Diekroeger said. "It's also been great just setting a tone and an attitude for the team, just building that chemistry. You're not going to see that in the stats or anything like that, but showing up to the field every day is a lot of fun for us."

Kenny Diekroeger has more than enough experience in setting an example on the baseball diamond, having played alongside his younger brother since T-ball. When he graduated from Menlo School in nearby Woodside, Calif., to come to the Farm, Danny picked up the slack at shortstop, hitting .462 and being named league MVP, like his brother before him.

It might not have measured up to his older brother's state MVP honor as a senior, but after playing beside him for so long, Danny Diekroeger doesn't feel like he has to match Kenny stride for stride.

"It's definitely cool to have someone to look up to like that, to see what you can accomplish and try to be like him, but I don't feel pressured at all," he said. "It's more that I'm just trying to do my best, and he's just doing his best, and we're happy for each other."

So when Danny Diekroeger chose to come to Stanford two years ago, he didn't do so just to follow in his older brother's footsteps.

"[Kenny being here] was definitely something I thought about, but it wasn't the biggest part of my decision," Danny Diekroeger said. "I think ultimately the reason we ended up at the same place was because we had a similar attraction to Stanford, in the combination of athletics and academics."

Danny Diekroeger understood that combination well from the start, according to Kenny, who said he was most useful in giving his younger brother insight into the day-to-day life of Cardinal baseball players.

And Danny hasn't struggled to carve out his own identity at Stanford, either; after arriving on the Farm as a management science and engineering major—just like his brother—he later made the switch to computer science and became the team's CS tutor. Kenny enjoys playing old Nintendo 64 games and lives in a dorm; Danny likes to recreate tunes he hears on the piano and lives in a fraternity.

But make no mistake: on the playing field the Diekroegers' goal remains the same, and their brotherly connection doesn't end at the dugout steps.

"We know what it's like to play with each other, but at the same time...we get along really well," Kenny Diekroeger said. "Us interacting with each other, that rubs off on other guys too, just the energy that can spark between us."

"It's nothing new to us," Danny Diekroeger explained, "But I know other guys on the team think it's funny that we're not afraid to argue with each other about stupid little things the way brothers do. We can be arguing one second and the next minute we'll be laughing about

something else.”

With any luck they will be doing a lot of laughing in the coming weeks, as the Cardinal takes on a series of top-tier foes to start the season. Opening night is next Friday, with Stanford hosting No. 10 Vanderbilt.