

Westwood High School's dugout rarely goes quiet for long.

Between innings, after at-bats, and in the moments most people don't notice, there is almost always a voice carrying through.

Ask around the program, and the same name keeps coming up.

Sam Thompson.

The senior catcher has become one of the team's most consistent vocal leaders, a steady presence teammates rely on as much as any performance on the field. Not because he is the loudest, but because he is constant.

As Westwood moves through its season, that presence has taken on a larger role, shaping how the team responds to failure, pressure and the pace of the game itself. Throughout the season so far, the dugout has been nothing short of supportive during hard moments.

At Westwood, leadership is not defined by a single moment. It shows up in the space between them.

After a strikeout. After an error. After a quiet inning at the plate.

That is where Thompson has built his role.

Head coach J.R. Langston said that presence starts with the standards Thompson sets every day.

"His work ethic is what leads us," Langston said. "The guys see how hard he works and how important this is. And that's what a leader has to do. A leader has to go out and work."

For Thompson, handling pressure is less about the moment and more about how he approaches it.

"I kind of trick my brain," he said. "I'm confident I'm going to get a hit... I'm going to try my hardest."

By simplifying the situation, he avoids letting it speed up on him, treating each at-bat the same, regardless of the moment.

Assistant coach Ray Mota has seen that develop over time.

Having coached Thompson since he was 10 years old, Mota said the traits that define him now are the same ones that showed up early.

The connection they have stretches back years.

Thompson's baseball journey began through his family. His older brothers played baseball, and through one of their friends, Thompson was introduced to coach Mota.

From there blocking became his strength, and by age 12 he had already won blocking measurables three years in a row, competing successfully against high school and college players despite his young age.

"I think any college would be lucky to get him," Mota said. "He'll run through a wall if he believes in you."

In a sport where failure is unavoidable, Mota said those traits are what separate players.

"It's hard to measure heart and toughness," he said. "If you tell him to do a drill three times, he'll do it 10 times."

That willingness to exceed expectations has translated into a role that goes beyond effort.

Especially at catcher.

Thompson transferred from ALA QC to Westwood during the second semester of his junior year.

His transfer wasn't seamless. His hardship request didn't go through immediately which kept him from playing half the season. Despite the setback, he stayed committed and continued preparing, proving himself to the team off the field.

Once he was back on the field, his leadership quickly became evident.

"Behind the plate, he's the captain," Mota said. "He sees things that coaches don't see."

That perspective requires more than just physical ability.

"He has to be a psychologist," Mota said. "You have to know when to give a guy a hug or push him."

For Thompson, that balance has become part of how he leads. Understanding when to push and when to stay steady, depending on the situation.

That presence extends across the roster.

Senior catcher Brody Newton, who transferred into the program as a senior, said their relationship has been built on mutual growth rather than competition.

“We make each other better,” Newton said. “It’s not like we’re against each other... we build each other up.”

For younger players, that tone sets an expectation.

“He’s really motivated,” sophomore Rio Morel said. “He wants to get better every single day... he’s a natural leader. It motivates me to play behind him.”

When asked how he wants his younger teammates to remember him after his final season, Thompson did not point to stats or moments.

“That I worked my butt off. Go 110%,” he said. “Everything isn’t about doing big things. It’s starting out small... and working your butt off until you can do it flawlessly.”

For Westwood, that standard shows up in more than just results.

It shows up in how players respond to failure, in how they carry themselves, and in the voice that doesn’t fade when the game gets quiet.

Not always seen, but consistently heard.

Looking ahead, Thompson is considering continuing his baseball career at Southwestern College in Chula Vista, California.