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Shimkus taking hill for Capitol Hill GOP

By Katherine Skiba, Tribune reporter

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WASHINGTON —

Rookie phenom Stephen Strasburg may be the most heralded pitcher here these days, but Tuesday night that designation could go to Illinois' John Shimkus.

The representative from Collinsville will take the mound at Nationals Park when congressional Republicans square off with their Democratic counterparts at 6:05 Central time.

He'll be trying to exorcise the demons from his last outing, when Republican members of Congress fell to Democrats 15-10 in 2009.

Shimkus, 52, who pitched junior varsity for West Point, said lawmakers take the seven-inning game seriously. "This isn't pansy ball," he said. "We're playing the best ball we can at our age. It's bragging rights for the whole year."

This being Congress, though, special rules apply. The game lasts only seven innings, and unlimited substitutions may be made throughout the contest.

Shimkus will wear the uniform of the University of Illinois Springfield Prairie Stars, who debut next spring.

Rachel Robinson, widow of Hall of Famer Jackie Robinson, will throw the ceremonial first pitch. The game benefits two charities — the Washington Literacy Council and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Washington.

Win or lose Tuesday, the Republicans still will have the upper hand, as they lead the historic series 38-33-1, said Steve Tomaszewski, a spokesman for Shimkus.

It will be his seventh time as pitcher (he thinks his record is 5-1).

Shimkus said the GOP had a good streak after the 1994 Republican "revolution" brought many newcomers to the House, but now he frets about the Democratic young bloods first elected in '06 and '08. "They've got a lot of young guys, so that means quicker, faster, stronger."

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