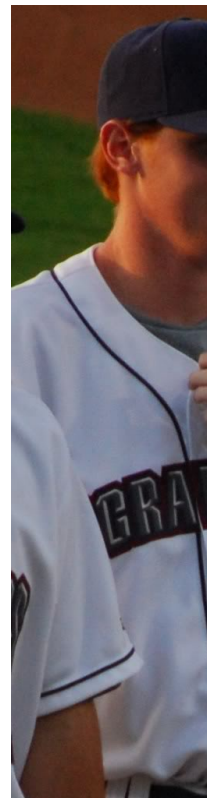


Brach Is Just Living The Dream

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Friday, December 18 2009 7:00 PM -

Monmouth University is located just off the Atlantic Ocean coastline in upper New Jersey, about an hour east of Philadelphia and an hour south of New York City. For a small school lacking much college baseball prestige and so far out of the way, it is another example that baseball talent can be found almost anywhere. The Indians did just that by selecting right-handed pitcher Brett Brach in the 10th round of this year's draft out of Monmouth. Tony had a chance to sit down with Brach this week to talk with him about his first year in the Indians organization.



When it comes to big time Division 1 college baseball programs, Monmouth University is nowhere near the top of that list.

In fact, many Indians fans have probably never even heard of the school before or know where it is even located. For those who have even heard of it, the most likely reason is because of some NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament office pools people may have filled out one time or another over the years.

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Brach, 21, had a very good professional debut this year for short season Single-A Mahoning Valley going 5-2 with a 2.19 ERA in 15 starts. In 78.0 innings pitched he allowed 62 hits, 1 home run, 20 walks and had 61 strikeouts, good for a nice

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7.2 H/9, 0.1 HR/9, 2.3 BB/9, 7.0 K/9 and 1.05 WHIP. It was really an outstanding season for him in just about any way you look at it from a statistical perspective.

Brach has a four pitch mix of a four-seam fastball, changeup, curveball, and slider, with the fastball sitting consistently at 89-91 MPH and topping out at 93 MPH. He is a sinkerballer who gets good downward movement on his four-seamer that pounds the lower part of the zone. He commands all four pitches of his pitches for strikes and uses a pitch-to-contact approach when he is out on the mound.

"I would like to think I am a sinkerball pitcher who can get a lot of groundballs and can pitch deep into games," said Brach in a recent interview. "That's what I want to do. I get my strikeouts here and there, but I would really rather use ten pitches an inning and get three outs quick than strike out ten guys in five innings."

While Brach's four-seam fastball is the pitch he relies on the most, the one secondary pitch in his arsenal that is the most effective and one he has the most confidence in is his changeup. He gets good separation on the pitch from his fastball as it usually sits at 78-80 MPH, which is 10 MPH or more below the velocity of his four-seamer.

"I throw my changeup with a lot of confidence," said Brach. "I think it is a good pitch and I get a lot of swings and misses on it. My curveball and slider are kind of a day to day thing where some days one is working better than the other. They are more of a feel thing, but the changeup and fastball are what I really like to work with."

The changeup is a feel pitch, and typically one of the hardest pitches for any pitcher to master and learn to throw consistently. Brach started throwing it three years ago as a freshman at Monmouth, and after toying around with it found a comfortable grip last summer where the pitch started to take off for him and be very effective.

"It took me awhile," said Brach. "Last summer I played in a summer league and that is when I started throwing it regularly. I didn't even throw it a lot in college until this season, so it is kind of a pitch I have been working on since I was a freshman. Finally last summer I found the right grip and I have been throwing it really well since."

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For as much success Brach had in his professional debut, there were a few things the Indians worked on mechanically with him late in the season. As a new player in the system, no changes were made initially as the Indians have a 30-day rule where they only "observe" new players in their system before implementing any changes to their mechanics.

"Yeah, [we worked on] my mechanics," said Brach. "A few pitching instructors when they came [to Mahoning Valley] and saw me throw a bullpen made two minor adjustments and ever since then it [was] smooth sailing. It was something with the way I was standing on the rubber. When I would step back I was drifting to my left so instead of coming down straight I was landing off balance, so I was missing spots and leaving the ball up. It was really minor as you wouldn't really notice it watching me, but when you look over the tape you see it. It really helped as it is definitely a difference and will help keep my ball down."

Brach went out to Instructional League from mid-September to mid-October to participate in the strength and conditioning program there in the hopes of adding some muscle weight and a tick or two to his fastball.

"I definitely want to get stronger just to make me more durable for next year," said Brach. "I mean, I feel like I am durable now, but a full season is going to be a lot different than [this past season]. I want to put on some weight and gain 1-2 MPH of velocity, and I know that will be tough as everyone wants to do that. But I really think I can as I have done it every year since high school. As a freshman I was 86-88 MPH, last year in the summer league I was topping out at 91 MPH, and this year in college I topped out at 93 MPH."

Right now, the Indians are stacked with candidates to pitch in the starting rotation at High-A Kinston or Low-A Lake County next year, so it is uncertain if Brach will remain in the starting rotation next year. He is not considered an upper level prospect, more mid-level, but given his success in his professional debut combined with his stuff he has a chance to develop into a good pitching prospect in the system the next year or two.

It is possible he could be converted to a reliever this year, or serve as a swing guy pitching in the bullpen the first part of the year and then in the rotation the second half of the year. In any case, he is up for whatever role the Indians put him in next season.

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"No, nothing yet," said Brach on whether or not he has heard if he will start or relieve next year. "I did pretty good as a starter, so hopefully I will stay there. But if they need me in the pen, I like coming out of the bullpen too so either way is fine. I'm just living the dream."