



The reality TV circuit has covered just about every genre of the entertainment industry imaginable. From singing and dance competitions, to former rock stars looking for love, to boxers looking to be contenders and so on, just about everything you can think of from an entertainment perspective has been covered.

Everything that is except for one. Baseball.

All that is about to change with a new reality TV show currently in the pipeline which may soon get the green light to start shooting this fall in old Dodgertown, the former spring training home of the Los Angeles Dodgers in Vero Beach, Florida.

The new reality TV show is called "The Natural" and is being produced by 108 Stitches Productions and is the brainchild of executive producer and creator Rick Marzan, who some may know as the actor who played the superstitious first baseman Jose in the baseball classic "Bull Durham".

"I was in Sweden and my wife and I were expecting our first child, and I was just doing some walking and it was all right in front of my eyes," says Marzan. "I know the camera and I know baseball. Things have just snowballed and people want to be on board [with the project]. We are happy about it and just crossing our fingers."

Baseball and Reality TV: A "Natural" Fit

Written by {ga=consigliere}

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Like its name, the show is about unearthing baseball talent from all across the nation and giving them a chance to showcase their natural abilities and see if they can land them a pro contract and maybe someday become a baseball star.

Every week pitchers will be put through new tests to see how they fare in things like agility, training, and mental stamina, and over the course of several weeks their progress with their pitching mechanics, pitch mix, control, command, and so on will all be charted. Viewers will see all the anxiety that comes along with being in a competition and them fighting to stay on the show, and like with any reality show this will lead to lots of in-fighting, escalating tensions, and accusations between the contestants as the pressure continues to mount.

Through all of this, the true makeup and character of the player will be brought out which is a key component in evaluating a baseball player. Their decision making, planning, performance, relationships with other contestants, and how they handle conflict will all be put to the test in front of the cameras. Ultimately, some will become friends, while others will become enemies.

"Everybody wants that shot," says Marzan. "We consider ourselves an extension of major league scouting. Most baseball tryouts are by invitation only, so you get those kids who never had a shot. Maybe the kid's parents died and they had to take care of their brothers and sisters, or a guy had to join the military to make some money. You just don't know. A lot of players had that dream and never had a chance."

How It Works

Only pitchers are being considered for the first season of the show, though in future seasons hitting and defense may be featured. To be eligible for the show, players must be ages 16-30 and sign a waiver that they are in good physical health. Contestants must also be an amateur as no former minor leaguers will be accepted. Another hard line stipulation is the player must sign an agent contract, and the real kicker is they must be able to throw at least 85 MPH.

Thousands of pitchers will be auditioned all over the country at three sites in Dallas, Los Angeles, and Boston. Auditions will take place over the course of two days from 6:00 am in the morning to 6:00 p.m. or later in the evening at each site.

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On the first day of auditions, pitchers will sign in and then receive a colored card indicating which one of seven stations they are to report. At each station will be a portable pitching mound and a professional pitching coach where every pitcher will get a chance to throw five pitches which will be recorded by a computerized target for speed and accuracy. The pitching coaches will write notes about what they see in regard to the pitcher's mechanics and how they throw. At the conclusion of the first day of auditions, the pitching coaches will get together and select 25 players to come back the next day.

On the second day the 25 pitchers will get ten pitches to better show their stuff, and likely will mix in some breaking balls and offspeed stuff to show their entire repertoire. Once all the pitchers have thrown, the coaches will deliberate and choose the four best pitchers to send to the next stage of the competition in Dodgertown. In all, four pitchers from each of the three sites will make up the 12 contestants who will compete for the title of "The Natural".

From there, the competition will heat up once things shift to Dodgertown as viewers will get all of the on-air drama as the baseball players and show staff - including trainers and coaches - get to know each other over the course of six to seven weeks of shooting in front of the camera. To help create some of that drama, the 12 pitchers will be split into two groups of six each living in one of two townhomes loaded with hidden cameras located on the Dodgertown campus.

Several episodes will be shot in Dodgertown where at the end of each episode a contestant will be eliminated. In each episode a different kind of pitching challenge will be featured where the winner of the challenge is given a save for that week and cannot be sent home. Challenges will target such skills as pitching speed, technique, accuracy, fundamentals, and so on.

A panel of three judges will decide who to send home each week. Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Gibson, former player and now broadcaster Al Hrabosky, and former Major League Scouting Director and now Florida Marlins scout Mickey White are expected to be a part of the judging panel. With the assistance and input from several professional pitching coaches on the show, the judging panel will decide on one pitcher to eliminate each week.

Once the field is whittled down to three pitchers, the final episode will be shot in Cooperstown, NY, home of the Baseball Hall of Fame. The three pitchers will take part in a nine inning game played on the field at Cooperstown where each pitcher will throw three innings. At the end of

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the game the judges will pick the winner, and the winner will get a one year guaranteed minor league baseball contract.

Making It Happen

The availability of Dodgertown was a unique opportunity that Marzan and show producers just could not pass up. They have been given free reign to the entire complex which includes all of the outdoor and indoor facilities, cafeterias, hotels, and two town homes former Dodger owners Walter and Peter O'Malley used at the site.

Lots of other places in California and Arizona were considered, but no site had it all like Dodgertown, not to mention the history and nostalgia it brings.

"Dodgertown was there and it is empty because the Dodgers moved to Arizona," said Marzan. "They need to make money and we needed to find something pretty inexpensive. Everything is there. It is a resort and it is a perfect place and unbelievable."

The show currently is not sponsored by or affiliated with Major League Baseball in anyway, though they have already received a verbal commitment from the Golden Baseball League, an independent minor league baseball league. The show itself should be a good vehicle for promoting the sport and Major League Baseball is always looking for new ideas to help connect itself with younger fans, so the addition of an intriguing player into any team's farm system would make for an intriguing draw. That said, Major League Baseball and executives of teams are aware of the show and there has been some strong interest on that front in being involved with the show in some capacity.

During the show's trek across the country to find candidates the focus will always be about baseball, but of course it will have the twist of drama that TV can provide through the raw emotions and comments caught on camera. Yet, everything will be "natural" and the performance of the players and what is shot on camera will do the talking.

"It will be a great show now and for the future," says Marzan.

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Through all the heroic performances and arguments, the fantastic and poor pitching, only one will be declared, The Natural.

For questions about the show or for those interested in being an investor, please contact show creator and Executive Producer Rick Marzan at thenaturalrs@yahoo.com.