

Tryout dream ends in foul nightmare

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After all this, I was hoping to get on the field and play some baseball. Instead, they divided us up and had us race 30 yards. I didn't do very well; I never was very fast. They continued till they found the three or four fastest people, and Morris was one of them.

Next, we played catch. I felt a little better doing something that resembled baseball. After this, the coaches put all but the catchers in center field. I had problems with the first couple throws because I had never played on astroturf before.

The catchers got their chance and I was up last. My first throw looked good. My second left a lot to be desired. I talked to Tadd a little bit and went home with thoughts of making the team dancing through my head.

A 'hot' day

The next day of the tryouts, actually two days later, brought high temperatures and only 20 to 25 people.

We stretched and went out to right field and ran 60-yard dashes. It was timed. I ran against Morris and he only beat me by a step and a half. Unfortunately, the time had a half-second difference. On the next run, I tripped part of the way. Coach Haley didn't even bother giving me a time because he said that catchers aren't fast anyway.

Catching pitches was the next line of duty. Each pitcher got two pitches to throw as hard as they could.

This assignment was an adventure in itself. All the pitchers were throwing as fast as they could and they threw accuracy to the wind. As a result, pitches in the strike zone were a rare and special event. Thank God for protective equipment.

While the pitchers were punishing me for my ignorance, the other players were throwing in the outfield. They were making 225-foot throws that were being timed by Sanders.

After I was done with my adventure behind the plate, I was sent out for my long throw. My throw was not accurate, and as it headed toward Sanders, I saw all chances of making the team fly out the window.

A no-hitter

I didn't hit Sanders, and he even managed to joke about it later. After this, he sent us to the mound with the explanation that they wanted to see if

there were any unknown pitchers in the crowd. My throw was 69 mph, which was around the speed that everyone else threw. Morris had the best arm and his was only 77 mph. My ego was not yet hurt, although my arm was in obvious pain.

The third day of practice, the morning of the Florida State game, was a hot day. At the game, temperatures on the field soared into the 130s. At the tryout it seemed just as hot behind the plate. Today, however, we would be scrimmaging.

Only 22 showed up, and we were down to one other catcher. But, because the coaches said they needed a catcher, many volunteers came to catch.

My first inning of catching was a career in itself. I was stuck with the hardest-throwing pitcher. After a few pitches, my throwing arm was sore and my catching hand was numb. He pitched for six outs and in the process I was hit in the side with a foul ball, hit on the hand with a foul tip, and hit in the groin with an errant pitch.

Better batting

Finally, I got to bat. I was nervous and the pitcher got two quick strikes on me. After a ball, I hit a weak fly ball to center field. I was first up, and was relieved that I didn't strike out.

I kept catching and got other assorted nicks and bruises. The only one that really hurt was a foul ball off the knee, which swelled up and was stiff in only a few minutes.

I got to hit again, but I wish I never would have stepped to the plate. I took the pitcher to a 3-2 count before I struck out. It was a curve ball that I might have hit with a golf club instead of a baseball bat.

Morris looked good, along with a kid named Carlson. Everyone developed a camaraderie even through they were competing for very few slots.

The fourth day of practice brought another scrimmage. I overheard one of the coaches mention this would be the last day of practice. They would cut after this game, so I went all out.

Almost everyone was more worried about the freshman football game than with practice. Everyone was getting anxious and they wanted to know if they were going to be cut.

I started catching again. My arm hurt, but nothing else really went wrong. For some strange reason, I didn't seem to be hurt by any errant pitches.

Sanders was worried after one foul tip, because he happened to be standing directly behind the cage and he saw the foul tip coming. It didn't phase me at all.

I got up to bat again and I struck out on four pitches. I wasn't ready to hit and it showed. The last practice, one of the coaches mentioned that they may keep a bullpen catcher and I was so intent on showing them that I could catch that I forgot about hitting.

Base bunting

I did get another chance to hit later on. When I got up, there was a runner

on second. There was no one out, so I thought I would impress the coaches with my ability to bunt. I don't know why, because in high school I couldn't lay down a bunt if my life depended on it, but I thought about it anyway.

I took the first pitch, which was down in the dirt. The second pitch was a perfect pitch to bunt. I stuck my bat out and made the best bunt of my entire life down the first base line. Of course, I was thrown out because I watched my thing of beauty instead of running.

The rest of the day was spent catching and getting hit. I had to leave early

because I had to go to night class, so Sanders told me to call him in the morning to find out if I had made the team. I never got a chance to say good-bye to anyone, but I wanted to wish them all good luck.

I called Sanders the next day and found out the bad news. He thanked me for coming out and told me he hadn't kept anyone, but if he needed me he would call. I still sit waiting for the call, my hopes fading with each passing day.

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