

SCARLETS SPORTS

PREVIEWS AND RECAPS OF VARSITY, CLUB, AND INTRAMURAL ATHLETICS

Down on the Farm

They call it The Show. Millions of kids dream about it, but only a handful are good enough to play major league baseball. Most high school and college baseball phenoms who defy the steep odds begin in the minor leagues, where they hope to ascend through rookie and independent leagues to Triple A—the staging ground for entry into the big leagues. There are 246 clubs in 20 minor baseball leagues nationwide and countless more in Latin America, fertile ground for cultivating tomorrow's Mariano Rivera. ▶▶▶

Andrew Lihotz pitched for the Coastal Kingfish last year. He's confident he will get signed by a major league team this year. "I don't want to look back one day and wonder, 'What if I had pursued my dream?'"

Down on the Farm






▶ “Down on the farm,” players endure cramped locker rooms, half-filled ballparks, and threadbare infields. Teammates, who never seem to stick around for very long, are on an escalator of talent assessment: some on their way up and others on their way down—and often out. Off the field, it’s an itinerant life of daylong bus rides, fast food, cheap motels, and low pay. Although visits to the Laundromat may outnumber autograph requests, few players would trade the nomadic life of minor league baseball for an office job.

Three former Rutgers players—Jack Egbert and Jeff Frazier, who led the Scarlet Knights to a Big East Conference regular season title in 2003, and Andrew Lihotz, a standout at

Rutgers–Camden—have been playing in the minors. In 2004, the Chicago White Sox chose Egbert, 26, who appeared in two games for the team last season, was released in September, and signed by the New York Mets. In 2004, the Detroit Tigers drafted Frazier, 26, traded him to the Seattle Mariners’ minor league affiliate in 2007, and got him back in 2008. Last year, Lihotz, 24, was signed by the Texarkana Gunslingers, traded before he arrived to play for them, then played for the Big Bend Cowboys for six weeks before being released and signing with the Coastal Kingfish in Houston, Texas. In the meantime, the three players forge on, buoyed by thoughts that the minor leagues are a mere way station en route to The Show.
— Bill Glavin









JACK EGBERT, Pitcher, New York Mets (Buffalo Bisons)

-  “It was a shock to the system playing rookie ball in Great Falls, Montana, where everything moves a lot slower.”
-  “I grew up in Rutherford, and everyone followed the Mets or the Yankees. When the Mets picked me up, it was an unbelievable feeling.”
-  “Sometimes when you’re on one of those 13-hour bus trips, you have to keep reminding yourself that you’re getting to play professional baseball.”
-  “There I was, standing on the mound at Camden Yards, in Baltimore, with family and friends there. I had to pinch myself.”
-  “I’m getting married in October. She’s pretty understanding of what the life of a ballplayer is like.”







JEFF FRAZIER, Outfielder, Detroit Tigers (Toledo Mud Hens)

-  “As you move up in an organization, the hotels, the ballparks, and the food get better. By Triple A, you’re flying to games in bigger cities, staying at four- and five-star hotels, and making decent money.”
-  “It’s a huge jump from Single A to Triple A, where every pitcher’s fastball moves and the breaking stuff is way better.”
-  “During the off-season, I subbed as a teacher in Toms River. It forced me to get up early and get my body clock in sync with spring training. At night, I’d visit the indoor batting cages, where I’d blast music and hit balls like crazy.”
-  “I got married two years ago, and we bought a house. My wife’s employer is very understanding. During the season, she comes and stays with me for a month.”
-  “This will be my sixth season. After six years, you are a free agent and can sign with anyone. I’ve had teammates who are career minor league players, and they’ve made a lot of money.”
-  “Last season, I hit .312 and had 11 home runs. I’m knocking on the door. It’s right there.”



ANDREW LIHOTZ SBC’08, Pitcher, Coastal Kingfish

-  “Before I even arrived to play with the team I signed with, I was traded within the same Texas league. After six weeks, they brought in a guy who threw 95 and released me. I made an impression, though, and immediately signed with another team in the league. Things change, day-to-day.”
-  “The difference between college and pro is night and day. My fastball is in the high-80s now. But if you don’t change speeds, locate pitches, and work the hitter, you’ll get shelled.”
-  “You meet people from every corner of the country and the Dominican Republic, where a lot of players destined for the pros come from.”
-  “I come from a Division III school, so I have to outwork D-I guys and players who were signed by major league teams. I’m confident I can get signed. I don’t want to look back one day and wonder, ‘What if I had pursued my dream?’ ”
-  “The salary was about \$1,000 for four months, but three teammates and I lived with a host family. The couple took us in, as if we were their children.”