



Thursday,
October 13, 2005

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Sports

Waseca falls in finals
to Eden Prairie



Kevin Dixon, a reliever at Minnesota State, is a starting pitcher in the Cleveland Indians farm system.

No relief: Dixon now a starter

By Brian Ojanpa
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — Kevin Dixon is about to conclude his first season of professional baseball, and if he were to grade his own report card, it sounds like he's giving himself a "C."

"I've had some good outings and some not-so-good outings," he says from Winter Haven, Fla., where he's wrapping up a month-long postseason stint with the Cleveland Indians' Florida Instructional League squad.

The 6-foot-3, 225-pound former Minnesota State pitcher played this summer with the Mahoning Valley (Ohio) Scrappers, the Indians' entry in the short-season (70 games) New York-Penn League.

Dixon's numbers weren't gaudy (3-6 record, 4.53 ERA), hence his middling self-assessment. But looked at another way, they're respectably on track, considering he's doing things "backwards" as a pitcher.

The Burnsville native was a closer with a mid-90s fastball at MSU, but the Indians are converting him to a starter, a transition Dixon admittedly had difficulty adjusting to.

"At first it was kind of weird going from a closer to a starting pitcher. On off days, starters have to sit in the stands and chart pitches and do the radar gun. That was hard because I was used to playing every day (as a DH/first baseman) at MSU, but after awhile I got used to it."

Dixon was drafted in the fifth round (154th overall) by Cleveland, the highest an MSU player has been drafted since 1986, when catcher Fritz Polka was taken by the Mets as the 42nd overall pick.

DIXON: Right-hander finds his pitch counts confining

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Dixon also played for the Mankato MoonDogs summer collegiate league team in 2004, posting a 1.45 ERA and team-leading four saves.

MoonDogs teammate and 2005 closer Neil Wagner of North Dakota State signed with Cleveland after the MoonDogs' season and also is playing with the Indians' Florida instructional team.

Dixon says his days in Florida begin with 9 a.m. practices, followed by 1 p.m. games against other instructional league teams.

"It's pretty hot down here, and almost like clockwork it rains between 3 and 5 every day," says Dixon, whose transition to starter has meant learning to pace himself and keep his pitch counts down.

"The Cleveland organization is real big on getting quick outs, using as few pitches as possible. And they keep pretty close pitch counts, sometimes too much so, I think. They had me on an 80-85 pitch count, but then they kicked me down to about 70."

Dixon says he hopes to get promoted next spring to a long-season single-A team. Meantime, he plans to spend the winter working out in Mankato and, hopefully, working.

"Yeah, put that in the paper," he says. "I need to get a job."

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