

Area pitchers picked in Major League draft

By KEN VOYLES

Two former area prep baseball players—Mark Wilkins, from Livonia Franklin and John Collier, from Redford Union—were selected recently in the professional winter baseball draft.

Wilkins was drafted in the first round by the Chicago Cubs and has since signed a contract to play with the National League team.

Collier was picked up by the Detroit Tigers in the seventh round and has decided not to sign. Collier will, instead, wait for the summer draft.

Wilkins' background in baseball goes way back. He started early and then really got into the sport in high school. "Ron Heller (former Franklin baseball coach) was a major influence on me. He changed a lot of things in both my pitching style and my attitude," Wilkins said. "When I was in 10th grade, I didn't think I would be continuing in the sport. Mr. Heller told me to come out and I thought it would be a challenge, so I did."

"Mr. Heller taught me a lot of things. He turned me into a pitcher and helped build my confidence," continued Wilkins.

From Franklin, Wilkins went to Eastern Michigan University where he played for one year and pitched in only a couple of games. It was then that he decided to transfer to Washtenaw Com-

munity College so that he would see more playing time.

At Washtenaw, Wilkins continued to gain his confidence and improve on his pitching skills.

"Every year I played for summer teams in the area and between that and my school experiences I gained a lot of confidence in my abilities," Wilkins said.

His major experiences during the summer league came with various teams including Griffin Sport Shop and Adray Photo.

As a member of those teams through the years, Wilkins traveled to the All-American Amateur Baseball Federation championships several times in Johnston, Pa.

Wilkins is to report to Mesa, Ariz. March 12 where he will play with the Sanazota Cubs, a Class A team, on of the lowest rungs in the minors.

"My first reaction came when the Detroit News called and told me I was drafted. I really didn't think anything of it until I was told that I was picked in the first round. That just flipped me right out," said Wilkins. "It hit me not long after that and I've been in a state of shock ever since."

"It turned into one of the happiest days of my life. It's something I've always wanted and this puts me closer to playing in the pros," continued the right-handed pitcher. "I was a little

worried about signing at first but I decided that I've got to get started now if I want to play in the pros."

Wilkins signed a two-year contract with the Cubs and if he improves will eventually become a member of the major league squad.

Herman Hannah, the Cubs' scout who first spotted Wilkins way back in his high school pitching days, has followed the pitcher ever since.

He has a good fast ball. He has to learn to pitch, naturally, like any other boy," Hannah said, "but he has an arm and we are willing to take a chance."

Collier said that he will continue to play for St. Clair Community College in the spring before the draft in June

when he will hopefully be picked up again by the Tigers.

"I've decided to wait until the June draft. I want to get the experience at school and continue my education more before I get into baseball," Collier said. "I was very surprised when I heard that somebody had drafted me. Hopefully in June the Tigers will still want to pick me up."

Collier, like Wilkins, started his baseball career before high school but it was in his senior year at Redford Union that he became a strong pitcher with an immense amount of potential. The right-hander was also a solid hitter for Bob Atkins' Panthers.

"John is a real fine competitor. He

came to us in his senior year and I think he is one of the better baseball players to come through here," Atkins said.

"He has good control and a good curve. He is not an overpowering pitcher," continued the former baseball coach and now athletic director at RU. Collier also saw action with LaDuke.

Roofing of the Detroit Adray League and traveled to the circuit's world series several times in the past year.

At RU, Collier collected a 4.3 overall record in his senior season. He struck out 62 batters and tallied a .300 batting average.

"John is a real nice kid. He's the kind of player you like having on your team.

He comes on strong in the latter innings of the games he pitches," Atkins explained. "He is a very hard worker on the mound."

If Collier had signed he would have reported to Bristol Va. of the Appalachian League in the Tigers farm system.

Bill Lajoie, the Tigers' former number one scout and now vice-president of the club, first saw Collier last summer when he was pitching in the Detroit Adray League.

"John is steadily improving and his pitching is getting faster. We think he will have a good season in junior college," Lajoie said.

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Boxing commissioner honored

Birmingham's Chuck Davey, Michigan Boxing Commissioner and successful insurance executive for New England Life, was among the former fight idols honored recently at the New York Downtown Athletic Club's third annual "Salute to Boxing Greats."

The Downtown A.C., best known as the sponsor of the Heisman Trophy for the outstanding college football player each fall, paid tribute also to former heavyweight boxing champions Jersey Joe Walcott and Floyd Patterson, ex-middweight champ Paul Pender and noted fighters Charlie Frazier, Ernie Durando and Davey.

During the award ceremonies, Davey went a mock two-round with Frazier and Pender. The retired professionals drew an ovation from the crowd in attendance.

Davey was cited for his brilliant career in the ring, and for the strong support he has given the sport since his retirement 25 years ago.

In his fighting days, Davey set a record which hasn't been broken when he won four straight NCAA boxing

crowns, and later earned an Olympic team berth.

As a pro, Davey scored national television victories over such fighters as Ike Williams, Rocky Graziano, and Carmen Basilio, all one-time champions.

Davey dropped his first pro bout when he lost to Kid Gavilan in a battle for the world welterweight crown. The Birmingham resident was still rated among the nation's top welterweights when he quit the ring to begin a career in business.

In 1963 he was named to the Michigan Boxing Commission. He has been chairman of the organization since 1965. He is currently serving his eighth term as vice-president of the World Boxing Association (WBA).

Davey is one of the founders and first president of the United States Boxing Association, which seeks to stimulate interest in boxing by sanctioning U.S. championship bouts. The association also publishes a monthly rating of all American fighters in every weight class.

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