

Stefanski hopes to have new start

BY BRAD EMONS
STAFF WRITER

Mike Stefanski considers himself caught in professional baseball purgatory.

As a catcher for the Triple-A Louisville Redbirds of the American Association, he's only one step away from the Major Leagues.

But the Gateway to the West, the famous Arch and adjacent Busch Stadium, home of the St. Louis Cardinals, seems thousands of miles away for the 27-year-old minor leaguer, who starred at Redford Union High School and the University of Detroit.

"I really don't have any future in this organization," Stefanski said. "Plus, I'll be a free agent next year anyway."

Despite limited playing time this season, Stefanski continues to put up good offensive numbers. Through 43 games he is hitting .322 with 47 hits in 141 at-bats with six homers and 24 RBI.

But he is lodged behind the Cardinals' future catcher, 23-year-old Eliseo Marrero, a Cuban-born player from Miami, Fla.

"He'll be in the majors next year," Stefanski said. "The kid is legit, just awesome. The best arm I've ever seen. Just a cannon for an arm. And he has tremendous bat speed and power."

In 82 games, Marrero is hitting .276 with 13 homers, a

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team-high 17 doubles and team-best 49 RBI.

Stefanski, who was drafted by the Milwaukee Brewers in the 40th round in 1991, has hit well at nearly every level during his minor league career.

He batted .304 his first year in Arizona; .273 with Beloit, Wis., in 1992; .322 with 10 homers and 22 doubles at Stockton, Calif., in 1993; .263 with El Paso (Double-A) in 1994 and .407 with El Paso again (in just six games).

On Oct. 19, 1995, Stefanski was traded by Milwaukee to the Cardinals for Marc Ronan, a Triple-A player with Louisville.

His troubles began when the Cardinals put him on the 40-man Major League roster.

"The strike year just put me behind the eight-ball," Stefanski said of the 1995 Major League Players Association walkout. "I had to honor the picket line. I just sat around at home when I should have been working down in the minors because I wasn't going to be playing that year in the majors anyway. I was really disappointed with the whole situation."

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The numbers reflected Stefanski's year away from the game. He batted just .208 with only 125 plate appearances in 53 games.

"I was just miserable when they brought me over here (to Louisville)," he said. "(Tony) LaRussa (the Cardinals' manager) brought in his own coaches and catchers. I was told I would play every day. Plus, I'm not an organization guy, somebody they drafted and brought along."

"I was bitter all last year. This year it's nice to play a little bit and do well. It's been fun, but it's been a battle. I'm battling for every at-bat. I'm not getting much exposure, but I'm fortunate I'm still having a pretty good season. Given the amount of playing time, which is about every fourth game, I'm swinging the bat well."

Stefanski hopes he can become the ultimate utility player. He occasionally plays first base and sometimes comes off the bench as a designated hitter.

"I'd like to do what John Wockenfuss did with the Tigers," he said. "Be able to go out there and play first base or outfield. I can still swing the bat and I'm a legitimate catcher."

Stefanski harbors hopes that the Tigers might express some interest. He'd be willing to spend more time at the Triple-A level in Toledo.

"It would be a dream of mine to play someday for my hometown team," he said. "I believe they're still looking for somebody

like me."

With Louisville out of contention in the American Association with a 43-60 record (as of July 22), Stefanski is just trying to play out the season. His family visits when the team plays in Indianapolis. Last weekend his mother Sandy paid a visit to Louisville.

"We're completely out of it (the pennant race), so it's kind of a salary drive right now," he said. "I like the town of Louisville a lot. I wouldn't mind settling there. But right now everything depends on playing time. I would say 'no thanks' if they wanted me back."

Stefanski spends the off-season in the painting business and someday he'd like to return to school and complete requirements for his college degree with an eye on coaching and teaching.

"Next year is my make or break year," Stefanski said. "I'll sign any place with any team that doesn't have anything catching."

And the way things are these days in the Big Leagues, and with two new expansion teams, Arizona and Tampa Bay, coming in next year, Stefanski might escape his baseball purgatory.

Baseball champions



Top team: The 11-year-old North Farmington-West Bloomfield Cobras baseball team won the Continental Amateur Baseball Association title. Team members are (seated, from left) Max Miller, Josh Feinberg, Tim Muir, David Swenson, Gary Kennedy, (kneeling) Mike Sacha, Steven Antonioti, Kris Clark, Chris Nielsen, (standing) Rob Campbell, Andrew Diamond, Jonathan Noble, Kyle Phillips, (back row) coaches Mike Noble, Tim Muir, Ted Sahakian and manager Roy Phillips.

Hines Park earns playoff berth

BY BRAD EMONS
STAFF WRITER

Pencil in Hines Park Lincoln-Mercury for post-season play.

Coach Dave Carroll's team wrapped up second place in the Livonia Collegiate Division of the Adray Metro Baseball Association with a 7-3 win Wednesday over the first-place Michigan Rams in a game played at Ford Field.

The victory gives Hines Park, 13-15, a spot in the National Amateur Baseball Federation's 22-and-under College Division World Series, a 10-team tourney beginning Aug. 7 in Rome, Ga.

Third-place Decision Consultants, Inc., of Livonia was eliminated from post-season contention with a 19-4 loss to the Windsor Stars on Wednesday.

DCI fell to 11-16. Hines Park's Kimya Massey, a left-hander from Michigan State and native of East Lansing, was the winning pitcher. He scattered seven hits.

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Second baseman Chris Karney (Redford Catholic Central/U-D Mercy), shortstop Bill Styles (Plymouth South/Henry Ford CC), catcher Carlos Fernandez (MSU) and third baseman Jeff Wozniak (Garden City) each had two hits and an RBI for the winners.

John Rogers, who pitched the final two innings in relief, took the loss for the Rams, now 16-10. Starter Brian Berryman (Redford Union/Michigan) pitched two scoreless innings, striking out three and walking one. Middle reliever Jason Westfall gave up three runs on five hits over the next three innings.

Tom Biljan went 3-for-3 in a losing cause.

Schuyler Donkes added two hits, including a double, and a stolen base for the Rams.

Hines Park, which started the season 0-8, has won 13 of its last

20 games.

"We played terribly, like a high school team, for the first part of the season," Carroll said. "We couldn't catch it, pick it up, throw it or hit it."

"A lot of our guys were red-shirted in college and did not play during the spring, so it took them awhile."

After Carroll juggled a few positions, Hines Park began to take off.

"We started to hit the ball and it took pressure off our defense," the Hines Park manager said. "We started to get good pitching and played good defense. It got contagious and we had fun. Things started to go our way. We learned how to win."

The Rams, meanwhile, are headed to the All-American Amateur Baseball Association regional tournament, which begins Aug. 2 in Altoona, Pa.

The winner advances the AAABA Nationals in Johnstown, Pa.

Cobras tumble in tourney semifinal

The NFWB 14-year-old Cobras girls softball team had a successful outing July 19-20 in Brighton, winning three straight before falling to Computware in the tournament semifinals, 4-3.

Chrissy King's grand slam paved the way for a Cobras victory in their opening game as NFWB blasted Okemo, 18-6.

King finished with four hits and drove in seven runs to lead a potent offensive attack.

Samantha McComb finished with three hits, including a home run, and four RBI. Kelly Taylor had three hits and scored twice; Andrea Lederman had three hits; Lindsey Taub and Ellery Diem chipped in two hits each.

Kristin Schrock tossed a one-hitter to earn the win on the mound.

In their second game, the Cobras rolled to an 8-0 lead over the Waterford Storm, then hung on for a 9-5 victory.

McComb (three RBI) and Schrock combined to drive in five NFWB runs. Taylor and King had three hits each, while Schrock and Lauren Ouellette contributed two apiece. Christina Columbo blasted a home run and scored twice.

Pitcher Beth Danielewicz allowed just three hits and fanned nine to pick up the win.

The Cobras crushed Algonquin, 20-1, in their third game behind the hitting of McComb, Taub and Russell with two hits each.

Schrock allowed just three hits to pick up her second victory of the tournament on the mound.

The Cobras fell behind Computware in the semifinals, 3-1, but a two-run double by Russell in the seventh inning knotted the score at three. Computware rallied with a run in the bottom of the inning to steal a 4-3 victory.

Ouellette and Lederman had

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two hits each.

NFWB was scheduled to compete in a tournament this weekend in Waterford and will travel to Chattanooga, Tenn., next weekend for the National Softball Association World Series.

Emmett hurls no-hitter

Lindsey Emmett pitched a no-hitter Thursday as the Farmington Hills Hornets split a doubleheader with the Canton Cobras in the Girls Incredible Fast-Pitch Softball League.

Emmett struck out six and went four in the nightcap, which the Hornets won 8-7.

Meghan O'Rear had two hits, drove in three runs and scored a run. Becky Vosler drew three walks and scored each time. Jen Emmett hit a triple.

The Cobras played the first game, 6-4. Leslie Schrock fanned seven, walked six and allowed five hits in a losing cause.

Vosler drove in two runs. Schrock and Lindsey Emmett (double) had a hit and scored a run. Kim Spalding, Jon Emmett, Jamie Swartz and Randi Taub contributed base hits.

Today, he joins Gehringer, Greenberg, and Kaline.

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