

Sports

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Wenson earns high marks in minors



Paul Wenson's arsenal includes a lively fastball and a hard-cutting slider. The Farmington High grad jumped from single-A to the Detroit Tigers double-A farm team this season.

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Paul Wenson doesn't need to watch "Sesame Street" to find out what the letter A means.

For the average baseball player, tailing an "A" is a symbol of the minor leagues. The A takes on a whole new meaning. Simply, it's another jungle to conquer. And the more A's there are, the tougher it gets.

Wenson knows. He made the jump this season from single-A to the Detroit Tigers' double-A farm team in Glens Falls, N.Y.

"Primarily, the difference between a ball and double-A ball is that you can get away with more mistakes," he said. "Wenson" is a graduate of Farmington High School. "Like throwing a fastball down the middle of the plate. In a ball, a batter might swing and miss or foul it off."

"Here, they hit your mistakes over the fence."

The fences have been safe this season with Wenson on the mound. In 21 innings of relief work, he's 1-0 and has a 1.29 earned run average, ranking him third among pitchers in the Eastern League.

SINCE SIGNING with the Tigers as a free agent after his junior year at U-M in 1986, he's shot up the minor league chain from Bristol (rookie), to Lakeland (single-A) and currently Glens Falls.

Let's see. After single-A, comes double-A, and then there's triple-A. After that, we're talking the bigs

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— Paul Wenson
Tigers minor league pitcher

with a locker at Tiger Stadium next to Guillermo Hernandez and Jack Morris, a Kroger commercial and, most importantly, a chance to borrow Jim Wadewander's Dead Milkmen records.

Wenson runs on the brakes.

"I'm just concentrating on pitching here in Glens Falls," he said.

Things, nonetheless, are encouraging. Last season with the Lakeland Tigers, Wenson was 9-6 and had a 2.72 ERA. He ranked sixth among relief pitchers in the Florida State League.

Wenson's arsenal includes a lively fastball and a hard-cutting slider. This season, with the help of Glenn Falls' pitching coach Jeff Jones, he's added a straight changeup.

"I just wanted to play pro ball," he added later. "The chance to sign was there after my junior year. I didn't know if it was going to be there after my senior year. So I took it."

"The jump from single-A to double-A is the biggest jump for a player," said Ken Lipschitz, general manager of Glens Falls. "It separates the men from the boys. What claims a lot of pitchers is a lack of confidence. . . . That's not a problem with Paul."

WENSON DIDN'T opt for the easy road. He had enough faith in his ability to sign after his junior year at U-M instead of waiting to see if he would be drafted in his senior year.

"I just wanted to play pro ball," he said. "The chance to sign was there after my junior year. I didn't know if it was going to be there after my senior year. So I took it."

"It's not as bad as they say it is," he said. "The money could be better."

"I'm moving up faster than I expected. A lot of the guys have been around a lot longer than I have."

"I just wanted to play pro ball," he added later. "The chance to sign was there after my junior year. I didn't know if it was going to be there after my senior year. So I took it."

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Often the role of the middle relief man is to clean up the mess the

starter leaves behind and set up the short reliever to come in, throw three pitches and get the save. Credit it usually misses the mop-up man.

"EVERYONE HAS their role," said Wenson, who has never started a professional game. "It's a role I've been in before. It's not that new."

At U-M, Wenson was primarily used in relief. He had a perfect 6-0 record in his three years with the Wolverines.

Wenson had problems harnessing his wicked slider, often plagued by control problems. He settled down in his junior year, compiling a 4-0 record. He followed up a key win against Minnesota in the Big Ten tournament in 1986.

He's eight credits shy of a sports management degree, which he plans to complete in the fall.

His strength as a pitcher is certainly enhanced by the addition of an off-speed pitch. He said it's a necessity in double-A to keep the hitters off balance.

Wenson is keeping hitters guessing with a right-handed instead of the now-can split-finger fastball.

"I tried it (the split-fingered pitch)," he said. "I just can't control the thing."

Which is the only thing he hasn't been able to master in the minors.

Comeback clips Canton, keeps Hawks flying high

baseball

After rallying to beat Plymouth Canton 11-10 at midweek, the Hawks won two games from Livonia Churchill, 9-2 and 11-7. Harrison is 5-4 in the Western Division and 8-5 overall.

play two games Saturday with Franklin, the other contender.

Mike Sulak pitched five innings for the Chiefs and turned over a four-run lead to him in the sixth. He gave up a run in the sixth, but one away from ending the game in the seventh when Harrison rallied.

Sean Murray started it with a pinch-hit double and scored on a wild throw after a hit that allowed Jason Lichten to reach home.

Leo Devine, one of the team's big hitters, doubled to put runners at second and third and set up Jason Hicks to game-tying, two-run double. Then, with a 9-8 lead, he drove in the winning run.

Both pitchers went the distance, with North's Bob Bullock getting the win.

Sturts was 2-for-4 and scored three runs. The previous night he had a two-run single for the winners. Mike Mackie and Rick Racham drove in one run apiece.

Farmington's Scott Seabolt was 2-for-3 with an RBI. With two runners on and his 11th inning, Seabolt's single got past the center fielder and enabled him to race home with the winning run.

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