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Off to the bigs

Local Sports

By Chris Montanini

Posted 1 hour ago

He thought he'd be playing near the sunny beaches of California, but ended up closer to the arid deserts of the Midwest.

But you won't hear former London Majors centerfielder Ryan LaPensee complain about the climate after being signed by Major League Baseball's Arizona Diamondbacks.

"I'm more excited than anything," LaPensee said from Detroit where he wrapped up his college career with the Wayne State Warriors.

He was working out with other minor-league hopefuls at a camp hosted by the San Diego Padres this summer where he had eight hits at six at bats, including a triple and a double, along with four stolen bases. "I couldn't have done any better," he said. "But they didn't need anymore outfielders. It's all a numbers game in the minors."

So the Padres let him go, but LaPensee's skills didn't go unnoticed, and eventually the Diamondbacks came calling.

The undrafted LaPensee will be on his way to join the Diamondbacks' class 'A' affiliate, the South Bend Silver Hawks, unless he can make a big impression at spring training in March.

He'll be working out with a friend in the Padres system this winter before he gets his chance to show off his skills as a professional baseball player.

"You can always improve," he said. "Nobody's perfect in baseball. I just want to become the best player I can be mentally and physically."

LaPensee was a standout at Wayne State, setting team records in hits (279), runs scored (195), doubles (50), total bases (386), games played (200) and at bats (696).

He's second in career batting average after hitting .401 over his four-year college career and is the only player in the school's history to hit .400 or better three times in a career, according to the Warrior's website.



Ryan LaPensee

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In his senior year, the 22-year-old broke single-season records for hits (87) and runs scored (62). He batted .424 and also hit seven homers along with 48 RBIs and 15 stolen bases.

"Ryan is a very competitive kid," said Majors manager and co-owner Roop Chanderdat. "He's got all the tools. He proved this year he's got some power too, he can really hit the ball."

In his rookie year with the Majors this past season, the speedy outfielder batted .352 and stole 20 bases.

"I loved it in London," LaPensee said. "(It) was a great place to play because the competition was against a lot of the guys that already had the opportunity that I have been given now."

He's the tenth London Major to be signed since new ownership took over the club in 2006. Zack Breault, the ninth, signed with the Toronto Blue Jays in September.

Dave Naradowski, a member of the 2008 Majors team that lost in game seven of the Intercounty Baseball League final, is already in the Diamondback's system and will give LaPensee some Canadian company when he shows up to camp in March.

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"From my standpoint, our goal is to field a winning team, but also (to) develop kids," Chanderdat said. "It's an important piece of our program."

chris.montanini@sunmedia.ca

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