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Headed for the Big Leagues

By Spencer Silva



Drew Jackson

Lamorinda's reputation as a baseball powerhouse crystallized this past week when four local players were selected in the annual MLB draft. Austin Rei (Campolindo, UW), Drew Jackson (Miramonte, Stanford), Paddy O'Brien (Miramonte, UCSB), and Collin Ferguson (Saint Mary's) were all selected to join the big leagues.

The Boston Red Sox selected Austin Rei with the sixth pick of the third round (81st overall) on June 9. Rei, a Campolindo grad, was sidelined for much of the Pac-12 season with a thumb injury. Upon his return, however, he quickly became one of the most feared hitters in the conference. He hit seven home runs in just 91 at-bats and led the conference in slugging percentage (.681). Rei's offensive performance shot him up draft boards, and by the time the draft rolled around, he was widely considered a top-five option at the catcher position.

Rei pointed out a sense of "NorCal pride" and marveled at "the number of guys, from such a small area who have either made it big or might make it big in the future." He added that in Lamorinda there is a great deal of camaraderie among players and families. "The parental support, family, friends, they are always coming out to games. We've all played sports together and we all support each other," he explained.

The Seattle Mariners drafted former Miramonte star Drew Jackson with the 20th pick of the fifth round (155th overall). "Feels great, a lot of anticipation going in before my name got called, but big relief when the name does get called," Jackson explained of the experience. "It was a surreal moment with my family, for sure."

Jackson, long known for his rangy defense at shortstop and canon-like throwing arm, was considered one of the best overall athletes in the draft. He had a breakout season at Stanford this spring, hitting over .300 for the first time in his college career and finishing second on the team with 27 runs scored, despite missing 17 games with a broken hand.

Jackson recalls growing up playing baseball in Lamorinda as a foundation for his love of the game. "Some of my best baseball memories are just going out, playing OBA [Orinda Baseball Association] with all my best friends," he noted. "It made baseball fun, and made me love the game. And, carrying that over into Miramonte, where I had some of the best years of my life both on the field and off the field with friends I'll cherish forever."

He is excited about playing for Seattle. It's on the West Coast and there will also be a legion of familiar faces in the Mariners' organization - they've drafted two Stanford players in each of the last three drafts.

Jackson is well prepared; he's seen his older brother Brett - a former first-round pick of the Cubs and current Giants farmhand - go through the same process. "It's really nice to have him as a mentor and role model. [He] always has been," Jackson said.

The New York Yankees drafted Jackson's former Miramonte teammate and friend Paddy O'Brien in the 24th round (723rd overall). Coincidentally, he served as a Yankees batboy at the age of 12. "This is something I've been trying to do since I was a little kid," he said, "I'm just really happy and excited."

The 6-foot-4, 220-pound O'Brien will begin a new venture upon signing - pitching. He played

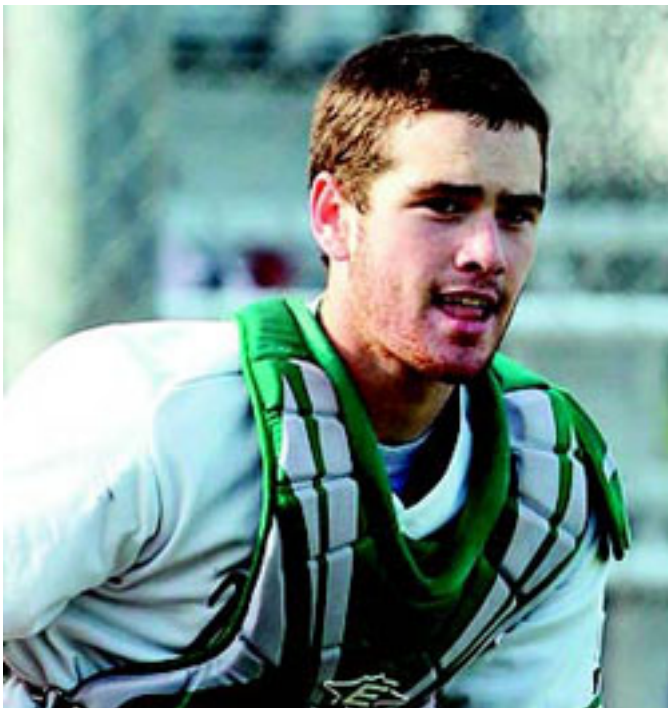
catcher for the bulk of his amateur career, but the Yankees selected him for the potential they see in his size and superior arm strength. "It's definitely going to be a little journey," he noted.

Miramonte head coach Vince Dell'Aquila is proud of his former players. "You know when you see those kids who get scholarships ... and watch them play for three or four years that they're special." He explained, "As a high school coach, it's very cool."

Saint Mary's senior first baseman Collin Ferguson was drafted in the 17th round (497th overall) by the Rockies. He was drafted by the Oakland A's in the 23rd round last year, but he chose to stay another year. His decision paid dividends. Not only did he improve his draft stock with a career year at the plate that included a .337 average with eight home runs and 24 doubles (a Saint Mary's single-season record), but he also walks away with a degree in Business Administration.-



Austin Rei



Paddy O'Brien



Collin Ferguson

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[back](#)

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