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Local ballplayers drafted by four MLB teams

By Nick Marnell



Denis Karas Photo Gint Federas

Four baseball players from Lamorinda programs were selected in the June Major League Baseball Draft, including two former Campolindo High School standouts and two star players from Saint Mary's College.

The Miami Marlins selected infielder Denis Karas in the 10th round and the Colorado Rockies chose outfielder Brett Stephens in round 28, as Karas and Stephens became the fourth and fifth players drafted from the Campolindo 2012 North Coast Section Division II championship team.

"They both benefitted from the hard work they put in," Campolindo baseball coach Max Luckhurst said. "They were dedicated to making themselves great players."

Stephens led Campolindo to four straight NCS Division II baseball titles (2010-13) and also quarterbacked the Cougars to the 2011 NCS Division III football championship, defeating Marin Catholic and current Los Angeles Rams quarterback Jared Goff. At UCLA, Stephens finished with a .354 on-base percentage, scoring 115 runs over 672 at bats.

As a senior at Campolindo in 2014, Karas was named then-Diablo Foothill Athletic League Most Valuable Player and was drafted in the 24th round by the Pittsburgh Pirates. He opted to attend UC Berkeley, where he hit 17

home runs and slugged .490 in 302 career at bats. Karas tied for the Pac-12 lead with 12 home runs in 2017.

Karas and Stephens join former 2012 champion Cougars Austin Rei, Robbie Tenerowicz and James Marvel, all five now with Major League organizations.

Two Saint Mary's players were selected in the top five rounds of the draft, with right-handed pitcher Drew Strotman going in the fourth round to the Tampa Bay Rays and infielder Zach Kirtley chosen in the fifth round by the St. Louis Cardinals.

Strotman finished 2017 with a 6-1 record and team-high 75 strikeouts and was named to the West Coast Conference All-Academic First Team. "Drew came to Saint Mary's for not only what we could offer him as a ball player but what we could offer him as a person," said Gaels baseball coach Eric Valenzuela, praising Strotman's velocity increase from 89-92 mph to near 96-97 during the last month of this season. "That jump elevated his status," Valenzuela said.

Kirtley tied the Saint Mary's modern-day record for walks in a season with 48 in 2017. He batted .292, slugged .439 and led the Gaels with an on-base percentage of .433. "He was one of my first recruits from Southern California, my home," Valenzuela said. "Zach brought us an edge. He drove me crazy for three years, but he helped push us to a higher level. He was a real grinder, and I'll miss that edge."

The selections of Strotman and Kirtley, both undrafted out of high school, bring the total number of Gaels drafted into the majors since Valenzuela took over in 2014 to nine, with seven players selected in the top 20 rounds.



Drew Strotman Photo Tod Fierner



Zach Kirtley Photo Tod Fierner



Brett Stephens Photo Gint Federas

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