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Hurlers Scherzer, Bausher and Ramirez All Make News, But Outfielder Nathan Haynes Is the Top Feel Good Story

By Bob Wirz

One of the great things in writing about baseball is the fact there are so many stories. If you talk to your contacts, dig into the variety of research channels and check out a few statistical files, the plate usually will run over with ideas.

This week seemed especially abundant, now the task is to try sorting out what really is meaningful.

Since they say pitching is 75 per cent of the game, this column is mostly going to be about three hurlers whose careers are at various stages, ranging from projected “no doubter” **Max Scherzer** to hopefuls **Tim Bausher** and **Edwar Ramirez**. Then for those who swing the bat every day, the heart-warming story of **Nathan Haynes**, Independent Baseball’s newest contribution to major league baseball.

The Golden Arm of Max Scherzer

One decision apparently was finalized Wednesday night in the developing story of **Fort Worth (TX) Cats** flame-thrower **Ma Scherzer** when the **Arizona Diamondbacks** tossed enough cash (early reports have it at \$4-4.5 million) into the 22-year-old’s barr just before the deadline which would have meant mega-agent **Scott** would have him back in the free agent draft in one week (June 7). Scherzer was the 11th player selected one year ago. The signing was subject to Major League Baseball approval as this was being written.



One thing is certain. Scherzer feels he really benefited from his three regular season starts in the **American Association** (1-0, 0.56). A fourth was rained out this week. “It has been great,” the former **University of Missouri** righthander told me during a chat at **Haymarket Park** in **Lincoln, NE** late last week. “It was the type of competition I needed.” That was understandable since he had not thrown a baseball in a game since the NCAA Super Regional a year ago.

The 6-foot-2, 210-pound Scherzer heaped praise on Fort Worth, with the bulk of it reserved for pitching coach **Stan Hilton**. “He has helped me so much,” Scherzer said, working on all the “little things I was doing wrong.” The result, the prize prospect believes, has made him

into a much better pitcher than he was one year ago, including an improved slider and change to go with a fastball that usually averages 94-95 miles per hour and tops out at 98.

Bausher Looking for a Second Break From Independent Baseball

Lincoln Saltdogs Manager **Tim Johnson**, whose credentials in 40 years in the game include playing for seven seasons in the major leagues and managing the **Toronto Blue Jays**, calls **Max Scherzer** “one of those no doubters.”

Not many players have the “no doubter” label on them, certainly not **Tim Bausher**, even though the **Nashua, NH** starter (1-1, 3.27) already has gotten within one batter of getting into a major league game. “I still feel I have some more development (in the future),” the 28-year-old told me recently.

He has come a long way since his time with **Seattle**, which drafted him out of **Kutztown (PA) University** in 2001, then told him he would never be able to pitch again because of a torn labrum which required surgery in 2002.

“Independent baseball gave me my first chance (**Pittsfield, MA**),” Bausher said, now it is giving him a second opportunity under onetime **Red Sox** star **Butch Hobson**. Bausher feels much more prepared now since he only had a fastball and curve when he was in the bullpen for 79 of his 81 appearances for **Boston’s Pawtucket, RI** Triple-A farm club in 2005 and 2006. He needed more pitches if he was to start, and has added a changeup as well as a slider. They obviously worked well Wednesday night when Bausher hurled six innings of five-hit, two-run baseball in a 5-3 win over **Sussex, NJ**.

It was during ’05 when the Red Sox summoned the 6-foot-4 Bausher to **Texas** and activated him for one day. He was told he would enter the game for the next hitter only to have **John Halama** induce an inning-ending double play. It was back to Pawtucket the next day.

Eight Surgeries Later Nathan Haynes Debuts in Majors

The best feel good story of the week for this writer belongs to 5-foot-9 outfielder **Nathan Haynes**, who had surgery eight times in the last decade with injuries such as hernias (two), knee scopes (three), torn ligaments in his left (throwing) hand and a torn labrum.

But Haynes is not starring in *General Hospital*, he is the newest outfielder for the **American League West**-leading **Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim**.

“It is a tremendous story and (a tremendous) young man,” praised **Greg Tagert**, who managed Haynes for the first 31 games of the **Northern League** season one year ago before the Angels signed him away from **Gary, IN**. “Everyone (who was here last year) roots for him almost as much as if they got the call (to the major leagues).”

“Let me come earn a job,” Tagert recalled Haynes saying before training camp, comparing the 11-year pro to a college senior seeking a tryout. All he needed was to prove he was healthy after being limited to eight games combined in 2004-05, when he belonged to the **San Francisco Giants**. “He was the best player I’ve seen on the field,” continued Tagert, who managed nine years in the **Frontier League** and has his third **Southshore Railcats** off to a 10-3 start this season. “There were nights he was a complete difference maker.”

Haynes, who doesn’t turn 28 until September and was leading the **Pacific Coast League**

with a .391 average at **Salt Lake City**, has a hit in his only time at bat in his first three days in the major leagues. “My heart was racing,” Haynes said to *MLB.com*. “I was just excited and glad that my dad was here (Anaheim) to see it and my mom was watching on TV.”

The pride of **Pinole Valley High School in California** admits the eight surgeries had led him to start questioning “whether my body would allow” him to continue. “But I always used to say that one day in the big leagues would make it all worth it, and being able to call my mom yesterday (before his debut) and give her the news just made my day.”

Clemens at 44 or Ramirez at 26? Hmmm!

Everyone has read about the six shutout innings **Roger Clemens** threw in the **International League** Monday in his final tune-up before starting to earn those \$18 million big ones the **New York Yankees** will pay him for the rest of the **American League** season.

What about the guy who followed the 44-year-old to the mound in **Scranton, PA**? It was none other than one of our Independent Baseball favorites, 26-year-old strikeout artist **Edwar Ramirez**, who was in the **United League (Edinburg, TX)** a year ago at this time and was in his fourth Triple-A game since being promoted from **Trenton, NJ** by the Yankees.

Ramirez blanked **Toledo** in the seventh and eighth innings, allowing only a walk and a single while protecting the 2-0 shutout. Here is where it gets to be fun. Clemens needed six innings to get six strikeouts. Ramirez got half that many in one-third of the time. I will give Clemens this: He threw strikes on 64 per cent of his 89 pitches; Ramirez only had 60.6 per cent in the strike zone. And Roger needed only 14.8 pitches per inning to Edwar’s 16.5.

Ramirez’s first foray into Indy baseball was at **Pensacola, FL** when it was in the **Central League** two years ago, and he has been in 68 Independent games to only 58 in affiliated leagues, including 13 this season where he surely has impressed Yankees brass because of his brilliant record in Class AA and Class AAA. In 23 innings, the 6-foot-3, 155-pound **Puerto Rican** is 3-0 with three saves, has been touched for only nine hits, has walked 10 and struck out 43. Yes, 43 K’s in 23 innings.

I cannot help but think that somewhere within the **Angels’** hierarchy someone is saying “how could we release this guy, not once but twice”, and somewhere within **Yankee Stadium** someone must be thinking about adding this young man to the beleaguered Yankees’ bullpen for considerably less than \$18 million.

Howie Clark Won’t Forget A-Rod ‘Effort’

I doubt **Howie Clark** had a similar experience during his time at **Chico, CA** in 2001.

The 33-year-old infielder-outfielder played in his 100th major league game Wednesday night—his first of 2007—and he became the centerpiece of a ninth inning squabble when **Alex Rodriguez** shouted what Clark heard to be “mine” as the **Toronto** third baseman tried to settle under a pop fly. Clark backed away, **Jorge Posada’s** ball dropped and the **Yankees** were able to pick up three insurance runs.

Let the media chew on the story, Howie. The good news is you are back in the major leagues after being without a job anywhere for a time this spring.

Colabello Explodes for 10-RBI Game

Worcester, MA first baseman **Chris Colabello** re-wrote the **Can-Am League** record book Tuesday night when he powered three home runs and drove in 10 runs in a 4-for-6 explosion at the expense of **New Haven County, CT** pitchers.

So the league is only in its third season since the **Northeast League** disbanded. No one had hit more than two round-trippers or driven in more than seven runs previously, and Colabello only had 15 homers in his first two years combined for **Rich Gedman's** Tornadoes.

Half Way to DiMaggio

I like the way one writer described **Joe Giannetti's** hitting streak, saying he was half way to **DiMaggio**. That meant, of course, that the 28-game **Atlantic League** record got the 25-year-old 50 per cent of the way to **Joltin' Joe's** fabled 56-game major league record posted in 1941.

Giannetti hit in his final 25 games with **Atlantic City** last season and in his first three after coming off the disabled list at **Newark** this spring. A third **New Jersey** team, **Somerset**, put an end to the streak by handing the third baseman-outfielder an 0-for-4 game.

Rain Spoils First Continental Weekend

One cannot help but feel for the **Continental League**, which already faces the fact it has only four teams and three stadiums in its maiden season. Mother Nature played a very dirty trick, wiping out seven of the first eight games on the opening weekend.

(The author has 16 years of major league baseball public relations experience with Kansas City and as chief spokesman for two Commissioners and runs his own sports consulting company in Stratford, CT. He is the author of a newly-published book *'The Independent Minor Leagues: 2006 Season in Review'* and a blog, www.IndyBaseballChatter.com. Subscriptions to the book and this weekly *Independent Baseball Insider* column are available at www.WirzandAssociates.com.)