

Grass Not Growing Under Onetime Dodgers Star As He Handles Multiple Duties in Golden League

By Bob Wirz

Mike Marshall has had what could be described as a roller coaster type of first half out in the **Arizona** desert where he guides the **Golden League's Yuma Scorpions**. The onetime **Los Angeles Dodgers** outfield star seems to have the right outlook to handle the multiple tasks he has been handed, and, by the way, is someone pretty practical to be guiding young baseball players.

When he picked up the telephone as he was coming off the diamond of what undoubtedly was another hot June day of working out **Arizona Summer League** hopefuls, I had in mind getting the lowdown on two brothers Marshall has managed, **San Francisco Giants** reliever **Sergio Romo** and Golden League grad **Andrew**, just starting in the Giants' minor league system. We ended up talking about a great deal more.

Marshall knew 2009 would be busy under any circumstances since the 10-year Independent Baseball veteran, who started as a player-coach at **Schaumburg, IL (Northern League)**, was scheduled to be both field manager and general manager of the Scorpions. **Talmadge Nunnari** at **Pensacola, FL (American Association)** might be the only other person doing this type of double duty.



Then, two days before the Golden League opened on May 21, Marshall was informed Yuma's roster would be stocked entirely by **Colombian** players. The Scorpions would even have an import as manager.

I did not hear so much as the hint of a complaint over this sudden change of plans when Marshall was on the phone. He confessed he likes both the business side of baseball and the on-the-field work where he first made his name as a key member of the Dodgers, including the 1988 **World Series** championship.

He said "about 22 or 23" of the approximate list of 30 players he still had in camp when the Colombian announcement came along have been placed with other teams, including **Austin Bibens-Dirkx** of **Victoria, British Columbia**, who leads the Golden League in strikeouts; **Donald Brandt** of **Chico, CA**, who is among the earned run average leaders; and Andrew Romo.

"I love it when the young guys go to college (before turning pro)," Marshall said, but

when Andrew Romo finally convinced the former right-handed hitting slugger college was not to be and his velocity improved to about 90 miles per hour Mike signed him to be “my fourth or fifth starter”. That was before the Colombian decision. Afterwards, Marshall found an opportunity for him with the Golden League’s new **Tucson** franchise. Young Romo made one appearance, throwing three innings in relief, striking out four and allowing only an unearned run, and the Giants purchased his contract.

San Francisco already liked 26-year-old Sergio Romo, who has a 5-1 record and an ERA of 1.84 for parts of two major league seasons, so why not give his 20-year-old brother a chance. Andrew pitched once for the Giants’ rookie **Arizona League** team, then was moved up to **Salem-Keizer, OR** where he logged a scoreless inning in his debut for the **Northwest League** team Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Mike Marshall has other matters on his plate. He needs to keep working to sell the Yuma community on the Colombian team, which he believes is “getting better and better” on the diamond after an extremely slow start, and a busy weekend looms. *ESPN* is coming to town to tell the Colombian story, and so is **Edinson Renteria**, the brother of San Francisco shortstop **Edgar**. They own the league in Colombia, and want their country well represented as baseball builds its globalization.

Yankees Sign Two Before Northern League All-Star Tilt

When the **Northern League** plays its **All-Star Game** at **Joliet, IL** Tuesday night part of the story will be about who is not there. There is plenty of talent spread among the six teams, but two premium stars are missing because their contracts have been sold to the **New York Yankees** and exceptional **Winnipeg** shortstop **Wes Long** fractured an ankle in a play at second base Tuesday night. He likely will miss the rest of the season.

Third baseman **Yurendell DeCaster** of **Fargo, ND** was the No.1 vote-getter, but the 29-year-old has taken his potent bat to the **Yankees’** top farm club at **Scranton/Wilkes-Barre, PA**. Hard-throwing southpaw **Edwin Walker**, with 29 strikeouts in 19.1 innings for **Gary, IN**, has joined **Class A Charleston, SC**. Walker, 25, also has played Independent Baseball for **Chillicothe, OH** of the **Frontier League** and **San Angelo, TX** of the **United League**.

Remember a few weeks ago when we reported the all-time winningest manager ever in Independent leagues, Fargo’s **Doug Simunic**, was facing an uphill battle to get to .500 (the RedHawks were 8-15 at the time), a figure he has topped in every one of his previous 16 seasons at the helm of a Northern League franchise.

Fargo is now at 20-19, but Simunic had DeCaster most of that time. He was leading the league in home runs (13), RBI (43), slugging (.682), doubles (14) and hits (54), and was hitting .344 when he left to join the Yankees system. “For my money,” Simunic said, “he is one of the best players to ever come through the Northern League.” Maybe one day he can give **A-Rod** those days off the Yankees feel their star third baseman needs.

What a Tough Loss for Winnipeg

Wes Long’s broken ankle has to be a devastating blow to **Winnipeg** even though the Goldeyes still hold a solid lead over **Fargo, ND** and the **Kansas City (KS) T-Bones**. He had come to town to replace seven-year stalwart **Max Poulin**, and was a two-way threat from the start, so much so that he was named **Northern League** Player of the Month for May.

Recently turned 27, Long was a good chunk of the backbone of **Windy City's** back to back championship teams in the **Frontier League** in 2007-08, hitting .334 and .331, respectively. He ranked among leaders in several offensive categories in the Northern League this spring in addition to anchoring an infield where he made only four errors.

Strikeout Artist and 'Walk-on' Part of Continental League All-Stars

Veteran publicist and current **Continental League** official **Bob Ibach** says scouts are anxious to see 6-foot-5 righty **Jake Leonhardt** when this third year circuit plays its **All-Star Game** at 75-year-old **Bringham Field** in **Alexandria, LA** Tuesday. Leonhardt has racked up 50 strikeouts and walked only four hitters in 43 innings for the **Bay Area Toros (Houston)** while posting a 1.67 earned run average.

My natural inquisitiveness leans toward getting a look at **Daryl Stanfield**, who we told you a few weeks ago had showed up with a cracked bat, very little money and asked for a tryout with **Texarkana, TX**, then proceeded to pound the ball over the leftfield fence. I would not have been surprised to hear Stanfield left town. Instead, he is hitting .390 and leading the league by 15 percentage points although he has only one home run.

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Divisional Titles Handed Out

Wichita, KS and **Fort Worth, TX** have claimed the first titles of the '09 season, winning their respective **American Association** divisions in runaways. Defending champion **Somerset, NJ** and **Southern Maryland (Waldorf)** are all but certain to join them with **Atlantic League** first-half titles before this holiday weekend gets very far along.

Kinney Fifth Indy Hurler to Break Into Win Column

While still a bit short of halfway in the major league races, no less than five former Independent Baseball pitchers have gotten into the win column for the very first time already this season. **Josh Kinney (River City, O'Fallon, MO, Frontier League)** could easily have been overlooked because he has a **World Series** ring for his stout rookie work for **St. Louis** in 2006. Kinney did not have a major league decision until getting the "W" against **Minnesota** last weekend.

The other first-timers are **Craig Breslow (New Jersey, Little Falls)** with **Oakland**, **Chris Jakubauskas (Lincoln, NE, American Association; Orange County, Fullerton, CA, Golden League; Florence, KY and Ohio Valley, Frontier League)** with **Seattle** and **Max Scherzer (Fort Worth, TX, American Association)** and **Clay Zavada (Southern Illinois, Marion, Frontier League)** both with **Arizona**.

Zavada, who had the unusual distinction of being charged with a loss June 21 even though he had yet to give up an earned run in the majors, finally was charged with a run this afternoon (Thursday) in his 20th appearance. It cost the lefty another defeat in the 10th inning at **Cincinnati**, 3-2, although his earned run average only went up to 0.48.

Lefty All-Star Cochran Finally Getting Exposure

Tom Cochran had a dickens of a time getting major league teams to look at him this spring even though he was all-Independent Baseball as a southpaw starter last summer when he won 13 of 16 decisions and compiled a 2.79 earned run average for **Worcester, MA** of the **Can-Am League**.

Cincinnati finally gave him a look and liked what it saw during spring training only to set the 26-year-old free because the Reds rosters were overloaded. So Cochran went into the **Atlantic League** at **Lancaster, PA** until the Reds decided to give the **Wilmington, DE** hurler another look. The signing may pay off. Now starting for Class AA **Carolina (Zebulon, NC)**, Cochran has a creditable 3.62 ERA (1-1, one save), and it might be even better except for one outing on three days of rest in which he gave up four earned runs in as many innings.

Promotion of the Week

Patriotism and bravery will be part of many a baseball celebration this Independence Day weekend, but the **Gary (IN) RailCats** have not one but two intriguing events lined up for their July 4 celebration at **U.S. Steel Yard**.

To recognize the 70th anniversary of **Lou Gehrig's** well known farewell address, the **Northern League** team will educate fans about the dreaded amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), better known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Gehrig's speech will be replayed, Gehrig baseball cards will be distributed, and an ALS patient will throw out the ceremonial first pitch. Greater Chicago's leader in raising funds to fight ALS, the **Les Turner ALS Foundation**, also is taking part.

As if that was not enough, the RailCats will be collecting supplies and funds to support **Operation OC**, a non-profit charity which sends donations to U.S. military troops serving in **Iraq** and **Afghanistan**. One of the benefits to the military men and women is satellite technology to help them stay in contact with their families.

(This is an excerpt from the column Bob Wirz writes on Independent Baseball. Fans may subscribe at www.WirzandAssociates.com, enjoy his blog, www.IndyBaseballChatter.com, or comment to RWirz@aol.com. The author has 16 years of major league baseball public relations experience with Kansas City and as spokesman for two Commissioners and lives in Stratford, CT.)