

Independent Baseball Insider

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George Sherrill Feels Honored to Represent The Independent Game in Postseason

By Bob Wirz

The question caught **George Sherrill** by surprise. And why not since the **Los Angeles Dodgers'** talented eighth inning southpaw has nearly five years in the major leagues. He would not have normally been thinking about his Independent Baseball days, as significant as they were, only hours before another important **National League** pennant race game at **San Diego**.

I was interested in knowing how the 32-year-old, who spent the first four and a half of his 11-year professional career in Independent leagues, would feel to be the only true grad of these non-affiliated leagues likely to be in the major league postseason starting next week.

"I didn't know," Sherrill started. "It is an honor. I hope I can represent (the Independent game) well."

The **Memphis** native certainly is a worthy representative since he had to work his way up all the way from 1999 to mid-2003 before a major league organization (**Seattle**) would give this **Austin Peay State** product an opportunity. Sherrill spent 1999 and 2000 with **Evansville, IN** of the **Frontier League**, then moved on to **Sioux Falls, SD** (**Northern League** at that time, **American Association** today) in '01 and to **Winnipeg** (Northern) for the next year and a half.



The only other player with Independent experience likely to taste the ultimate October major league thrills this season would appear to be **Boston** outfielder **J.D. Drew**, but when he started out at **St. Paul, MN** in 1997-98 he was a highly-touted prospect waiting to negotiate a handsome contract. Reliever **Edwar Ramirez** (**Pensacola, FL**, now in the American Association, and **Edinburg, TX, United League**) would seem to be a long shot to be on the **New York Yankees'** 25-man roster and **Josh Kinney** (**River City**, Frontier League) is in a similar position with **St. Louis**, where he was a major surprise three years ago. **Brendan Donnelly's** hopes of getting back to the postseason were extinguished earlier this week when the **Ohio Valley** (Frontier League) and **Nashua, NH** (**Atlantic League**) hurler's **Florida Marlins** were eliminated.

"It has been a long trip (to the majors)," said Sherrill. "I would not change a thing. It (baseball) has made me what I am today. It is a tremendous honor and very humbling."

Sherrill, who had 31 saves for **Baltimore** and played for the **American League** in the All-

Star Game last season and another 20 saves in '09 before being sent to the Dodgers just ahead of the July 31 trading deadline, has been brilliant for **Joe Torre's** club. He has allowed only two earned runs in 25.2 innings for a 0.70 earned run average with one save.

"I never had it in me to quit," the reliever uttered of his days in Indy leagues. He is quick to single out his parents, **Lee** and **Susan**, for their steady support along with current **Philadelphia** Assistant to the General Manager **Charley Kerfeld**, who signed him for the Mariners; former Seattle pitching guru **Rafael Chaves**, now ironically with the Dodgers, and **Winnipeg** Manager **Hal Lanier**, who was at **Sussex (Augusta, NJ)** of the **Can-Am League** this season.

I could not resist asking Sherrill what he expected to be thinking when he is introduced prior to the first **N. L. Division Series** game next week. "Get it over with as soon as possible," he explained, saying he feels much more comfortable in the bullpen than during pre-game ceremonies. He might also be slightly looking forward to November, because that is when he and fiancé **Lindsay** will walk down the aisle in **Salt Lake City**.

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Maui, Maybe Others Join Golden League

The assertive nature of the **Golden League** seems to be paying off. That is unquestionable from a publicity standpoint, and hopefully it results in a better bottom line as important partners come on board.

Starting play only five years ago, the league has struggled to lure major crowds to prove long-term viability. The **Atlantic** and **Northern Leagues** are more powerful in this regard with the **American Association** picking up steam. The Golden has showed sponsorship strength from that very first season, though, because of its relationship with **Safeway** food stores, and it has done well in getting players signed by major league organizations.

The latest step in possible maturity came this week when it was announced a team has been added on the **Hawaiian Island** of **Maui** for 2010, with as many as three other franchises a possibility in the **Aloha** state in future years.

This means little old Independent Baseball will have a single league with teams in western **Canada** (three) and the **United States** mainland in three western states. The Golden League had planned to have a team in **Tijuana, Mexico**, this season until the **Swine Flu** came along, and the league says the idea is not dead.

One intriguing aspect of the Maui deal is that it will be operated by **XnE, Inc.**, which also operates ticket, sponsorship sales and concessions businesses and recently bought the **St. George (UT) Roadrunners** in the same league. The yet-to-be-named Maui team will play in **Iron Maehara Stadium**, which seats 1,500 fans but can expand to 5,500, league officials say. Maui will have week-long series and two-week homestands, and should bring excitement to the island since Hawaii has not had professional baseball except for winter play since 1988.

The Golden League release indicated "additional teams will be announced over the coming months...with more expansion prior to" 2010. It now has 10 teams, including Maui.

Well Traveled Halama Dominates Playoff Series

Veteran major leaguer **John Halama** (56-48, 4.65) has had one of those “if it is Tuesday it must be **Newark**” type of years, but the 37-year-old left little doubt he still can pitch when he somewhat single-handedly lifted **Southern Maryland (Waldorf)** into the championship series of the **Atlantic League**. Another noted lefty, **Sparky Lyle**, gets to see what the 2009 version of John Halama is all about now as this onetime **Yankees** closer sends his **Somerset (NJ) Patriots** in quest of their fifth **Atlantic League** title against the Blue Crabs. Game 1 was scheduled for Thursday night.

Halama was 8-1 with Southern Maryland in 10 starts through early June before joining the **Atlanta Braves’** Triple-A team in search for more big league time. He went 4-7, 4.48 with **Gwinnett, GA**, mostly as a starter, but returned to the Atlantic League in time to get a three-inning tune-up the final weekend of the regular season.

The 6-foot-5 **Brooklyn** native, whose best of seven major league stops were in 1999, 2000, 2001 at **Seattle** when he had consecutive plus-.500 seasons with 11, 14 and 10 wins, took any frustration of not getting to join **Bobby Cox’s** Braves out on **Long Island, NY**, for whom he had pitched two years ago. Halama opened the best-of-five **Liberty Division** series with eight shutout innings (four hits, no walks) in a 1-0 victory, then came back in Game 5 and allowed only one earned run in 7.2 innings (eight strikeouts) as the Blue Crabs prevailed, 7-5.

El Paso’s Blackley Sharp in World Cup

Any number of current and former Independent players took part in the recently-completed **World Cup** won by the **United States**, with the best of the group seemingly being 24-year-old right-hander **Adam Blackley**. The **Australian**, who went 7-9, 4.98 for **El Paso, TX** of the **American Association** one year ago, won his only decision while posting a nifty 1.69 ERA in 16 innings. He struck out 13 World Cup hitters.

60 Wins Not Out of Reach

Former Independent pitchers had amassed what this corner considers an excellent 58 victories in the major leagues this season heading into the final four days of the campaign. The pack is led by onetime **American Association (Fort Worth, TX)** hurler **Max Scherzer** of **Arizona** with nine victories while **Northern League (Edmonton, Alberta, now in the Golden League)** righty **Scott Richmond** of **Toronto** and the **Northeast League’s** **Craig Breslow** of **Oakland** both had eight. Breslow pitched for the **New Jersey Jackals (Little Falls)**, now in the **Can-Am League**.

Another 20 wins would be tacked on if the **Los Angeles Angels’** **Jered Weaver** (15 wins) and **D. J. Carrasco** (five) of the **Chicago White Sox** were included. Weaver once trained with **Camden, NJ** of the **Atlantic League** while Carrasco had signed with **Johnstown, PA** of the **Frontier League**.

Sense of Humor Advised for This Wedding Cost

Fans have been invited back to **Silver Cross Field** in **Joliet, IL** Sunday afternoon even though the **JackHammers** have long stored bats and balls until spring.

Shortstop **Kevin Rios** and his fiancé, **Melissa Krupp**, will hold their wedding in the

Northern League stadium. A \$5 admission is planned, but Joliet General Manager **Kelly Sufka** suggests everyone “think of it as a way to replace the dollar dance.”

(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 also is the author of a blog, www.IndyBaseballChatter.com. Subscriptions to this *Independent Baseball Insider* column are available at www.WirzandAssociates.com.)