

Play Hard:

The Story Of Sweet-Swinging, Slick-Fielding St. John's Third Baseman Greg Hopkins

by Tim Brown, St. John's Athletic Communications

For St. John's junior Greg Hopkins, setting goals is the key to being successful and his desire to accomplish goals is what fuels his determined work ethic and makes him such a fierce competitor. The third baseman's gritty style, however, is nothing new. In fact, it can be traced back to his AAU days and the simple mantra of a member of the Frozen Ropes coaching staff: "play hard."

For the native of Mansfield, Mass., the journey to St. John's began with the

goal of going to college to play Division I baseball. Recruited by Boston College, Duke, Villanova and Richmond, Hopkins ultimately chose St. John's because of its comfortable atmosphere and the way that head coach Ed Blankmeyer described the program.

"Coach told me that the program was built on a blue collar attitude,"

Hopkins said. "We're a Northeast team that works hard and competes with the big boys in college baseball."

For Blankmeyer, Hopkins was the type of player St. John's needed.

"We were looking for an infielder and we liked his range and his arm," said Blankmeyer. "Of course, we also recognized his power potential."

The third baseman got an early taste of playing with the big boys, going 1-for-3 with a two-run double against then-No. 2 UNC in just his second-career start. Later in his rookie campaign, Hopkins and the Red Storm won their 42nd game, a new school-record, with a 2-1 triumph against then-No. 19 Texas in the NCAA Tournament.

Hopkins, who recorded his 100th-career RBI in just his 111th game at St. John's, is a .335 career hitter and has a simple approach at the dish.

"It's important to know what needs to be done based on the situation," Hopkins begins. "That being said, though, I want to hit the ball hard and be a tough out."

Sure-handed in the field, the junior has a penchant for making tough plays at the hot corner. Hopkins bare hands slow-rolling bunts with ease and has made the back-handed play towards the third base line look routine.

"I've always taken great pride in my defense because I love to make a great play," says Hopkins. "But most importantly, it helps the pitcher and the team."

After two full seasons at the Division I level, the junior is well-aware of how his game has changed since he's arrived in Queens.

"Playing well is all about staying focused from pregame preparation through the final out of the game," Hopkins says. "I've learned to develop a short-memory and not to take an at-bat into the field."

Following the 2009 college season, the third baseman spent his summer playing for the Haymarket Senators, who went on to win the Lineweaver Cup as Valley League champions. An all-league selection and a mid season all-star with the Senators, Hopkins led the league in hits, ranked fourth in total bases and fifth in batting average.

Hopkins played in 51 games for the Senators after playing in 43 games for the Red Storm, which brings to mind another lesson he has learned while at St. John's.

"Have fun," Hopkins says matter-of-factly. "Baseball is a long season and if you don't have fun then it's going to feel like a long season."

Of course, Hopkins has aspirations of playing professionally and scouts have taken notice of both his



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offensive and defensive prowess. After his season with the Senators, Hopkins was named a Valley League Top-10 Prospect by Baseball America.

"A pure-hitting third baseman, Hopkins anchored the heart of the order for the league champions," the scouting report from Baseball America begins.

"Hopkins employs a wide base at the plate, taking a short stride to the ball with a level swing that results in gap-to-gap power. He stays inside the ball well, letting him take off speed pitches the other way, but he also has the bat speed to turn on the inside fast-ball. Hopkins is a solid defender with a sure glove and his bat is good enough to play anywhere."

Quick to recognize his third baseman's development, Blankmeyer believes that Hopkins has realistic aspirations of playing professional ball.

"Greg has certainly gotten stronger and has truly

developed into a very consistent player," said Blankmeyer. "He puts together quality at-bats and has also developed the power and production that we thought he would. Greg has professional aspirations and I believe that he will be successful in reaching those ambitions."

Though encouraged by the attention he has received regarding his play at the next level, Hopkins knows that right now he is at St. John's for a reason.

"It's nice knowing that there are eyes on me and it shows that hard work and consistency pay off," Hopkins explains. "But you can't get caught up and lose focus on what you're trying to accomplish. You have to keep things simple and use goals as stepping stones to help you get where you want to be."

When asked where he wants to be, Hopkins begins to list the goals of the Red Storm squad. Win the BIG EAST regular season crown, win the BIG EAST Championship, win a regional, win a super regional, make it to Omaha for the College World Series and win it all.

At the heart of his goal-setting, though, is the simple desire to be recognized as a certain type of player.

"I want to be labeled as a competitor," Hopkins says. "I want to be seen as a player that wants to get dirty and loves to win."

This is exactly what Blankmeyer sees in Hopkins.

"Greg is a player that leads by example and works hard," Blankmeyer said. "But most of all he just loves the game. He loves to play and he loves to win."