

BASEBALL'S BEST

RECEIVE VARIOUS END-OF-SEASON COLLEGE HONORS

by Bill Ballew

The South Carolina Gamecocks were not the only ones deemed winners at the end of the 2010 college baseball campaign. While Southern Indiana captured the D-II title and Illinois Wesleyan won the D-III crown, seven players received recognition for their outstanding individual efforts from throughout the spring.

Ruffin Rules

The first award was announced during the opening day of the College World Series when Texas pitcher Chance Ruffin was tabbed the Stopper of the Year by the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association. A junior from Austin, Texas, Ruffin posted a 6-1 record and saved 14 games while striking out 97 batters in his 64 2/3 innings. The membership of the NCBWA selected Ruffin over fellow finalists Kevin Arico of Virginia, Louisville's Neil Holland, Chris Dennis of Portland and

Arizona State's Jordan Swagerty.

A three-time All-Big 12 honoree, Ruffin helped guide the Longhorns to the conference crown by going 3-0 with five saves in league play. He surrendered only three earned runs and fanned 50 batters in 31 innings while limiting Big 12 opponents to a .180 batting average. Overall, his 1.11 ERA was the lowest by a Texas hurler since 1982 and ranked second in the nation. Ruffin also topped the country by averaging 13.5 strikeouts per nine innings, and became the first Longhorn to record double digits in wins in a season (2009) and saves in a single slate (2010).

Ruffin has been dominant since arriving in Austin. In 2008, he was tabbed the Big 12 Freshman of the Year after leading the conference with a 1.96

ERA. He also went 8-3 with three saves while seeing time as both a starter and reliever. Ruffin moved into a starting role as a sophomore and ranked among the nation's leaders with 18 starts and 124 innings pitched. He concluded the campaign with a 10-2 record and a 3.32 ERA.

Fiery on the mound regardless of his role, Ruffin accepted the closing responsibilities from the start of the 2010 campaign. He said a crucial moment occurred against Stanford on Feb. 27 when he worked 3 2/3 innings against the Cardinal. His biggest moment may have come in the Austin Regional when he shut down a Louisiana-Lafayette uprising in the eighth inning and returned in the ninth to notch his 14th save to establish the Texas single-season mark.

"Your team goes out and works hard for eight innings, you can't be the one to come in and give it all away in one inning," Ruffin said of his role. "I use the fans, their energy. I'll use everything I've got to leave it all out there and keep runs off the board."

Just prior to receiving the Stopper of the Year award, Ruffin was selected in the supplemental first round of the major league baseball draft by the Detroit Tigers. As the 48th overall pick, Ruffin was drafted higher than any Longhorn since Drew Stubbs (eighth overall) and Kyle McCulloch (29th) were nabbed in the 2006 process. Ruffin had not signed as Baseball The Magazine went to press.



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Holy Holaday!

Texas Christian reached the College World Series for the first time in school history and even emerged as the local crowd's sentimental favorite in Omaha. One of the major reasons the Horned Frogs achieved their unprecedented success was the performance of senior

Bryan Holaday, who was named the 2010 Coleman Company-Johnny Bench Award recipient as the nation's top catcher.

The unquestioned heart and leader of the Horned Frogs, Holaday posted a school-record 99 hits this season and batted an impressive .355. He started all 68 games, tallied 72 runs and drove in 53. He also added 24 doubles, a triple and 17 home runs. Those numbers led to his receiving three Mountain West Conference Hitter of the Week honors over the course of the season as well as MVP honors of the Houston College Classic and the MWC Tournament.

Defensively, Holaday was even better while guiding a staff that posted a

3.55 ERA. He threw out 46 percent of runners trying to steal and posted a .988 fielding percentage. His glove work combined with his potent offense led to Holaday besting Miami's Yasmani Grandal and Coastal Carolina's Jose Iglesias as finalists for the Johnny Bench Award.

Holaday began his collegiate career at North Central Texas College in 2007 before transferring to TCU and emerging as the starting catcher as a sophomore a year later. He ranked fourth on the team with a .311 batting average and earned first-team All-MWC recognition. In 2009 he received second-team all-conference accolades and clubbed 10 home runs, nine of which came in MWC games. He also led the league with 32 runners caught stealing for a whopping 52 percent success rate.

Perhaps most impressive about Holaday's performance was the way he worked with freshman sensation Matt Purke, who won all 16 decisions in his first collegiate campaign. Purke, in fact, credited Holaday for much of his success, saying, "Bryan has really brought me along and shown me the ropes. He's been there when things have gotten a little hectic to slow me down, and he's been right behind me when things are rolling. I can always trust Bryan and I know what he's going to do, especially when there's a guy on third base. He's going to block every ball and not let one get by him. I can then concentrate on making good pitches and getting swings and misses. I know he's going to be right there to handle it. If a guy tries to run, he's got one of the best, most accurate arms I've ever seen."

Named to the CWS all-tournament team, Holaday was drafted in the sixth round by the Tigers and signed with the team shortly after returning home from Omaha.



Rendon Rocks

With most power hitters, the potential for home runs comes at a price, namely strikeouts. Such is not the case with Rice sophomore third baseman Anthony Rendon. This past spring, Rendon led Conference USA with 26 roundtrippers, yet fanned only 22 times. That stat exemplifies just how efficient and effective the Owl infielder is, which led to his being named the 24th recipient of the Dick Howser Trophy as college baseball's player of the year.

Named the C-USA Player of the Year in each of his first two seasons, Rendon led Rice to the regular-season title and the school's 16th consecutive NCAA Regional appearance. He batted .402 in conference play and hit .394 overall. He also ranked among the nation's leaders with 83 runs scored and 65 walks while posting an on-base percentage of .530. Rendon added 12 doubles and 85 RBI to his output, leading to an .801 slugging percentage.

Rendon, who received the Howser Trophy over finalists Yasmani Grandal of Miami and Mississippi pitcher Drew Pomeranz, earned additional accolades as well this year. Baseball America magazine and the

American Baseball Coaches Association tabbed him its 2010 National Player of the Year. Rendon also was named Most Outstanding Player of the Austin Regional and the Male Athlete of the Year for all sports in Conference USA.

Following the conclusion of the 2010 season, Rendon earned a spot on the USA national team in mid-July for its international summer tour. Two days later, on July 14, he suffered an ankle injury during a game in Cary, N.C., against South Korea. The ailment landed Rendon back in Houston, but did nothing to alter his euphoria over being named the Howser Trophy winner.

"This is overwhelming," Rendon said. "It was an honor just being one of the finalists, and being named the actual winner is amazing. There were a lot of guys with great years so it feels tremendous. When the season started back in February, and even in the practices before that (in January), I worked pretty hard because I wanted to have a good year. I got off to a slow start, but I thought I had a better second half of the season. I was happy how I finished the season, but the main thing was winning the conference championship and going to a regional."



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The Great Gyorko

Defense remains the primary job of shortstops at the collegiate level, yet those who contribute as well with the bat are a godsend for any program. West Virginia's Jeff Gyorko was that type of player for the Mountaineers in 2010, which led to his receiving the Brooks Wallace Shortstop of the Year award, which was presented by Mizuno.

"He meant everything to our team," said West Virginia head coach Greg Van Zant. "Jeff is a terrific player and an even better person. He was highly touted this year and knew he would get a lot of attention. But even with that, he passed more hours in the fall than any player on the team. In the spring, with all that was going on around him, he finished with a 3.7 GPA in management."

Gyorko was named a first-team All-American by the

NCBWA and received second-team recognition from a plethora of publications, including Baseball America, Collegiate Baseball and the American Baseball Coaches Association. The junior earned the honors after concluding the 2010 campaign with a .381 batting average as well as a school-record 19 home runs. He added 57 RBI, 28 doubles, 90 hits, 71 runs scored and 177 total bases.

The shortstop is the first Mountaineer to earn All-America accolades in multiple seasons, having been recognized as a second-team All-American by the NCBWA after his freshman and sophomore slates. His situational statistics impressed professional scouts the most, which led to his being drafted in the second round by the San Diego Padres in June. Gyorko owned a 92-to-75 walk-to-strikeout ratio, hit .508 (98-for-193) against left-handers, .364 (183-for-503) against right-handers, .398 (94-for-236) with runners in scoring position, .341 (75-for-220) with two outs and .321 (87-for-271) with two strikes. He also was walked intentionally 10 times, including eight last season.

Having signed with the Padres shortly after being drafted, Gyorko concluded his collegiate tenure as WVU's career leader in batting average (.404), doubles (73) and extra-base hits (113) and is tied atop the leader board with 35 home runs. His fielding percentage in 2010 was an impressive .973, which helped Gyorko win the Wallace Award over finalists Christian Colon of Cal State Fullerton and George Mason's Ryan Soares.



Wimmers A Winner

College baseball north of the Mason-Dixon Line is played at a disadvantage due to the lack of outdoor practice time and cold weather, particularly when compared with the environment teams in the Sun Belt experience. That scenario had little effect on Ohio State junior righthander Alex Wimmers, who overcame a hamstring injury that cost him three starts to go 9-0 and win the Pitcher of the Year Award, presented by Diamond.

"Alex is a great talent and one thing about him, like all good players, when Alex was on the mound, he made his teammates better," said Bob Todd, who retired as the Buckeyes' head coach at season's end. "He has a knack of knowing what pitch to throw. He keeps hitters off-stride. It's a joy to watch him."

A reliever as a freshman in Columbus, Wimmers attracted national attention as a sophomore by going 9-2 with a 3.27 ERA to earn All-American recognition from six different organizations. In addition to leading the Big Ten with 136 strikeouts and a .211 opponents' batting

average and being named the conference's co-Pitcher of the Year, the righthander tossed the first nine-inning no-hitter in Ohio State history on May 2, 2009, when he struck out 14 Michigan batters.

This past spring Wimmers paced the Big Ten with a 1.66 ERA and an opposing batting average of .218. In five starts in conference games, he went 4-0 with a 1.15 ERA. At season's end he was named Big Ten Pitcher of the Year again, becoming the first back-to-back winner in conference annals. Drafted by the Minnesota Twins in the first round in June, Wimmers ranks among Ohio State's all-time top five in four key statistical areas, including fewest runs allowed (81), strikeouts (273), fewest earned runs allowed (71) and fewest hits (173). He also ranks sixth with a 2.94 ERA.

"I was thrilled, absolutely thrilled to learn I had won the award," said Wimmers, who received the nod over finalists Drew Pomeranz of Mississippi and Florida Gulf Coast's Chris Sale. "It just goes to show how that hard, hard work truly can pay off. It's such a great honor to be chosen by the College Baseball Foundation for this award. It's hard to explain what I am feeling. To think that Stephen Strasburg won this award last year and now I'm getting it this year. It's really crazy, isn't it? This is just so unbelievable and it truly is an honor."



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Multi-Faceted McGee

The newest honor in college baseball is the John Olerud Two-Way Player of the Year Award, which was presented for the first time after the 2010 season. The College Baseball Foundation created the award to recognize the best player who made an impact both on the mound and at the plate. Florida State's Mike McGee became the first honoree by edging out Nick Ramirez of Cal State Fullerton and Kolbrin Vitek of Ball State.

"Having watched John Olerud play college baseball, there is no finer recipient to receive an award named after him than Mike McGee," said FSU head coach Mike Martin. "Poised, passionate, willing to do anything to help his team win are all traits of John Olerud. Michael's year was culminated by taking his team to the College World Series."

The junior from Port St. Lucie, Fla., played in every game for Florida State in 2010. In 62 starts in left field, McGee batted .328 with 82 hits, including 15 doubles and 17 home runs, and drove in

73 runs. For the second straight season, he paced the Seminoles in roundtrippers and RBI. He also served as FSU's closer, going 4-1 with 13 saves and a 2.96 ERA. The righthander fanned 33 batters in 27 1/3 innings and gave up only 15 hits on the season while limiting opponents to a .160 batting average. Eight of his first nine saves came in Atlantic Coast Conference contests. He also made one start, on March 8 at Jacksonville, and no-hit the Dolphins for six innings.

After earning second-team All-ACC recognition as a sophomore, McGee received first-team accolades as a utility player in 2010. He also was named a third-team All-American as a relief pitcher by Collegiate Baseball prior to being selected in the 41st round by the Arizona Diamondbacks in the major league baseball draft.

"I grew up watching John Olerud play in the major leagues," McGee said. "After being nominated for this award, I looked up his stats as a college player and his sophomore season (at Washington State) was insane. His numbers were outstanding that year and were as good as any college baseball player could ever hope for. He pitched and hit amazingly well that year."



The Chosen One?

The world at large was introduced to Bryce Harper when Sports Illustrated wrote a front-cover feature story on the hard-hitting catcher when he was in high school. Shortly thereafter Harper received his GED in order to graduate early and attended the College of Southern Nevada in order to be eligible for the 2010 amateur draft.

While some observers questioned the strategy as well as the hype, Harper left no doubt he knew what he was doing. Not only did he become the first overall pick in the draft, selected by the Washington Nationals, the 17-year-old also put together one of the more remarkable offensive campaigns in college baseball history and was named the winner of the Golden Spikes Award, presented by USA Baseball to the top amateur baseball player in the country.

"We had a great core of guys," Harper said. "Everybody that was out there was for me, and having my brother there really helped out a lot. They all helped me. I think I started out the season 3-for-25. I was absolutely overwhelmed by it because I had never been in that kind of slump in my life. I started talking to my dad and going over some film and we got everything right from there."

A catcher who also played some third base and left field, Harper attracted most of his attention at the plate—with a wooden bat. Harper hit .443 in 66 games, clubbing 31 homers with 98 RBI while slugging .987 and posting a .526 on-base percentage. The freshman was named the Scenic West Athletic Conference Player of the Year and helped the Coyotes become Region XVII and Western District champions and advance to the Junior College World Series.

Harper became only the second JUCO player to win the award, following pitcher Alex Fernandez, who received the honor in 1990 after twirling at Miami Dade Community College. The final tally was one of the closest in the award's history; Harper received 28 votes to garner this year's honors to narrowly beat Mississippi pitcher Drew Pomeranz (27 votes) and Miami catcher Yasmani Grandal (24 votes). The other Golden Spikes finalists were Florida Gulf Coast hurler Chris Sale (18 votes) and Central Florida outfielder Chris Duffy (five votes).



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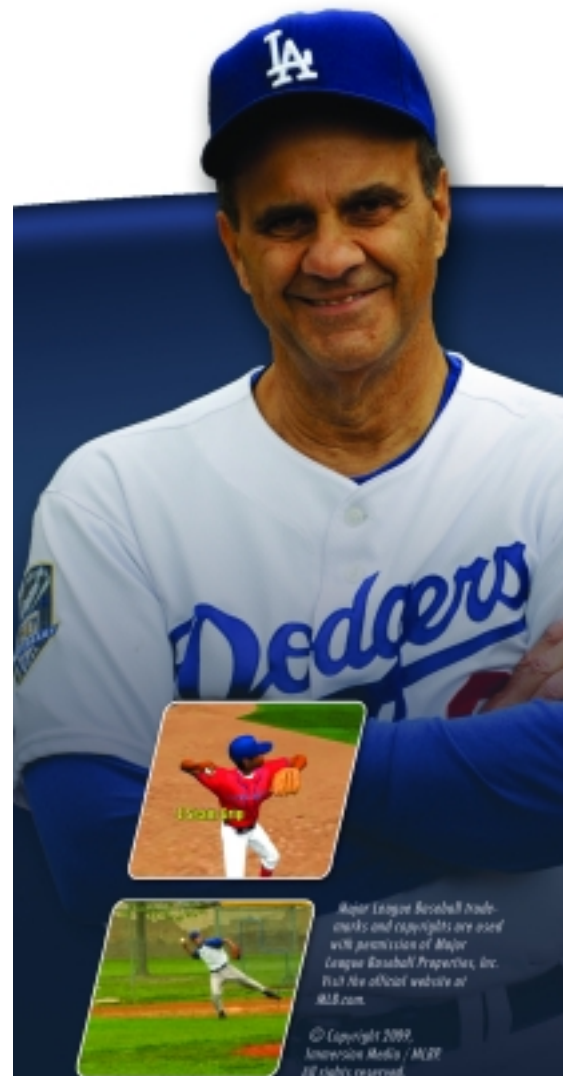
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