

Features



TOP

Smith Pursues His Field Of Dreams

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Smith Pursues His Field Of Dreams

By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports

West Palm Beach, Florida Feb 13, 2011 Whenever a youngster begins to play a sport, a common dream for many is to go on to play at the professional level. A young Dexter man has taken the first step in realizing that dream.

Sawyer Smith, 19, is a 2010 graduate of Dexter High School and the son of Kip and Pam Smith and is playing baseball at the collegiate level.

“I’ve been playing baseball for as long as I can remember. I started out playing seriously on some traveling teams when I was 13 or 14,” said Smith, “and I moved into Babe Ruth league when I was 15. The team I was on won state [championships] twice.”

Smith grew up playing the sport on league and traveling teams. In addition, he learned much about the game-and life-from his mom’s father, the late Jack Overby of Newbern, Tenn. ‘Papa Jack’ mentored a young Smith, giving him tips, advice, and support in life and sports.

Smith had an outstanding high school career for the Bearcats, starting several

games his sophomore year and becoming an everyday starter in his junior and senior years. “I played the corners [1st and 3rd Base] my sophomore year, and rotated between

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that and catching my junior year.”

Smith plays at Palm Beach Atlantic University, a NCAA Division II school located in West Palm Beach, Fla. Coming out of high school, Smith had offers from many schools spanning all levels of collegiate baseball. He cited Arkansas State University, the University of Tennessee-Martin, Austin Peay State University, the University of North Dakota, and Palm Beach Atlantic as his top five schools after he had narrowed his choices down.

“My family and I decided that a four-year NCAA school would best fit me. I wanted to play at the highest level possible; somewhere that I would have the best opportunity to play and have growth as an athlete, student, and person,” Smith said. “It was hard to turn down a Division I offer, but Palm Beach Atlantic fit all the criteria; I loved every bit of my visit and I couldn’t see myself anywhere else.”

PBAU assistant baseball coach Ryan Holmes said the university was looking for a strong catcher that would get stronger with both age and experience.

“What led us to recruit Sawyer was we were looking for a catcher for our 2010 recruiting class and Sawyer was a kid we could project to get stronger as he physically matures; he already possessed good size at six-foot four and 210 pounds,” Holmes said. “He has an above average arm and in high school showed the ability to project as a power hitting prospect with his swing. His versatility was also a big factor.”

Smith also has a very rare opportunity being a catcher at PBAU - his head coach is Gary ‘the Kid’ Carter. Carter had an 18 year Major League Baseball career, and played catcher for the Montreal Expos, New York Mets, San Francisco Giants, and Los Angeles Dodgers. He was an 11-time All-Star, five-time Silver Slugger, three-time Gold Glove winner, and 1986 World Series Champion with the Mets. Carter was inducted into baseball’s Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY in 2003.

“I’m very blessed with the opportunity; its unbelievable,” Smith continued. “I never thought that I’d have a chance like this. He’s as good of a person and coach as he was a player. ‘The Kid’ doesn’t mess around when it comes down to business. He does so much for us, opens up a lot of doors to help us succeed and advance as players.”

Smith said Carter works closely with the team’s catchers and he has taken advantage of the opportunity.

“I’ve picked his brain a lot. I’ve got a great relationship with him; it’s not every day that you get to talk to a baseball legend about how to improve your game,” he commented.

Smith was adamant in his praise for the entire PBAU coaching staff, as well as his teammates.

“Again, I’m very blessed to be surrounded by such great people. The assistant coaches and trainers here at the ‘U’ are great; everyone here has your back,” Smith said. “We’re a family, and stick together no matter what. I think our chemistry as a team will help carry us and make a big difference in our season.”

Holmes praised the Dexter native and said Smith will see some action this season.

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“He is battling to be our backup catcher as a true freshman and will get some meaningful playing time this year,” Holmes continued. “In college baseball you need two good catchers to get through the season; we are mostly playing five games a week, and usually play a three game series on Friday night followed by a doubleheader on Saturday.”

Smith has always been enthusiastic about the game, and being able to play at the collegiate level has done nothing but make his love for the game grow.

“As a freshman, I’m not a starter, but I will get in there quite a bit,” Smith said. “I’ll probably catch the tail-ends of doubleheaders on the weekends, and the occasional mid-week game,” he said. “I actually made my debut Saturday [Feb. 5] at Northwood University. I caught the second game of a doubleheader, and we won 4-2.”

According to Holmes, Smith could potentially have the opportunity to play at the professional level.

“Sawyer has the size that professional scouts look for. With hard work and continued development, you never know what could happen beyond the collegiate level.”

Smith conceded that professional baseball was always tucked away in the back of his mind. Even after being contacted by a few professional scouts while still at DHS, Smith and his parents decided that college was the better all-around option.

“It was rough at first, and I still have a lot of room to improve,” Smith said on his

transition to catcher. “I feel like its the toughest position on the diamond.”

Smith said the catcher controls the tempo of the game, and has to mentally and physically stay in control. But he has never completely let go of playing at first or third base.

“I’ve never completely let the corners go,” he commented. “I still take reps to keep me versatile. Who knows-maybe one day I’ll wind up back there.”

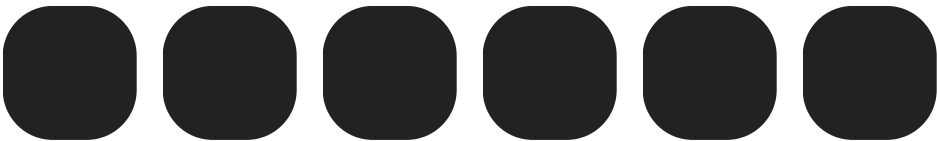
Despite all of the praise from coaches and achievements throughout his baseball career, Smith still stays a very driven, humble young man. For the boy who began Little League on the fields in Dexter, to learning the love of the game from his ‘Papa Jack’ to the high school standout - he has come a long way while keeping his roots.

“Its my love of the game. I’ve played it for as long as I can remember, and its always been my favorite sport,” he said. “I love this game and I’ll keep playing it as long as I am able to. However, I do it all to glorify Christ, and I give all the credit to Him, as well as my family, for giving me all these amazing opportunities.”

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