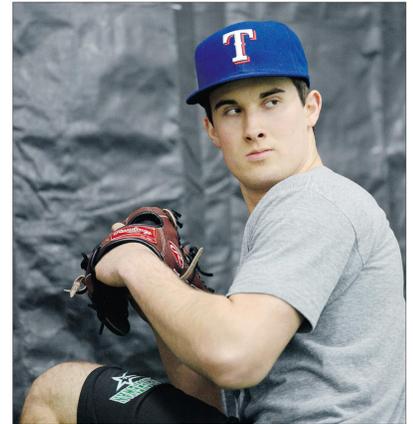


Sylvester has major-league aspirations

Jeremy Sylvester during a recent training session at Inside Pitch Academy in Regina.

Photograph by: Don Healy, Leader-Post, Leader-Post



Jeremy Sylvester used to have what was arguably the best gig in all of high school athletics.

As the starting quarterback for the Riffel Royals in 2011, Sylvester helped that team achieve an undefeated regular season en route to a 4A city and provincial championship. But when he returned to the team at the beginning of the 2012 school year, his Grade 12 season with the Royals, he asked that someone else take the snaps so he could assume a different position.

Why? Because he has eyes on a much bigger prize - the big leagues of baseball.

"It was a pretty overwhelming job," Sylvester said of his role as Royals quarterback. "Everybody is always talking about the quarterback ... it's the high school thing, right? It was a lot of fun, but football is over for me now. Even this past year, I wanted to take on a lesser role because I didn't want to risk an injury that would hurt me for baseball."

Sylvester is definitely on the right track. In a recent workout at Regina's Inside Pitch Academy, Sylvester's fastball flirted with the 90-miles-per-hour range. An impressive feat in its own right, it has caught the attention of baseball elite in this country. Walt Burrows is Canada's executive director of scouting for Major League Baseball and will be in Regina next month to gauge Sylvester's progress. A solid showing for Burrows could get Sylvester drafted by a big-league club this summer.

"What Jeremy is about to do is uncommon," explained Morgan Reiter, instructor at IPA. "This year, within the next two months, he'll be throwing 90 to 91 miles per hour. And with his curveball mixed in, he has some serious potential and some serious tools to work with."

When you consider Sylvester's velocity has made such a dramatic jump since last year at this time, when he was clocked in the low-to mid-80s, it makes sense that scouts would want to take a longer look at the 18-year-old right-hander.

But in order for Sylvester to continue his steady progression in the baseball circuit - last week he signed a full athletic scholarship to play at Galveston College in Texas - he needed to take a step back from football.

Sylvester played football for three years with the Royals. He also captured a provincial badminton singles title during his Grade 11 year. But those two sports always took a backseat to baseball, a sport he has played since he began T-ball at age five.

"I always felt I had more of a natural knack for baseball than any other sport," he said. "I played for Team Sask with baseball, played at a pretty high level with that sport, but never did I do any of that with football or anything else. Baseball is the route I'm taking and I'm pretty sure that's the right thing for me to do."

According to Reiter, Sylvester ranks among the country's elite prospects. When Reiter and Burrows were setting up a date for the scout's visit, Burrows admitted he hasn't seen a kid in Canada at Sylvester's age throwing this hard.

Sylvester's statistics from this past summer as a member of the midget AAA Wolf-pack suggest he's someone worth watching. He struck out 29 batters and walked only four in 30 innings and posted a 1.82 earned-run average. He helped the team reach the gold-medal game at the Western Canadian championship last summer in Edmonton.

"Jeremy is easily in the top five per cent in the country. He has crazy arm speed," Reiter said. "When he throws, it doesn't look like his max effort. He has an electric arm and the ball just jumps out of his hand. I have trained close to 1,000 kids, and Jeremy is right near the top."

Sylvester has been impressed with his jump in velocity. However, he continues to work on his mechanics, his hip rotation and arm angles four nights a week at the indoor facility. Throwing 90 miles per hour is nice, he said, but he's still learning more about his craft.

"I'm learning more and more about every little piece about my pitching motion," he said. "I'm not just going to the mound and throwing. I'm constantly thinking about what I'm doing and thinking ahead to the next pitch. As you start to face better competition, you start to face better hitters. Being a pitcher, you have to know what to throw to which hitter and not just go out there and try to blow guys away."

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