

## Stewart takes aim at Division I starter's role

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Posted 8/13/09



*(Enlarge) Travis Stewart, a former Pallotti High baseball standout, hopes to be one of the top starting pitchers in 2010 for Division I College of Charleston. He spent this summer recovering from shoulder surgery that was done following his sophomore year at Northwest Shoals Community College in Alabama. (Staff photo by Matt Roth)*

Travis Stewart headed to college last week and on Aug. 25 he will begin fall workouts with the baseball team at Division I College of Charleston.

The Laurel resident hopes those workouts will begin a journey that leads to a key role as a right-handed starting pitcher in the spring for the Cougars and, ultimately, a shot at being drafted in June by a Major League Baseball club.

That may be a stretch, perhaps, since Stewart, 20, was not drafted out of Pallotti High School in 2006 or after a successful season on the mound for Northwest Shoals, a community college power in Alabama, two years later. And he is coming off shoulder surgery, which forced him to redshirt at the College of Charleston in South Carolina in 2009.

But Stewart, who exudes confidence, does have a few things in his favor: he is 6-foot-6 and 230 pounds, his fastball has reached 90 miles per hour and he is with a college program in the warm-weather South that had four players drafted last June. He did not play on a summer league team but spent many days working out at Panther Park in West Laurel and lifting weights at the home of a nearby family friend.

"It has been like the same thing every day. It is a lot of time and a lot of work but it is what I need to do to get back in shape," Stewart said. "My goal was to be in the best shape possible. When we start working

out I am a step ahead."

This summer, before he went back to college, Stewart would take three bags of 50 baseballs each and throw them towards the backstop at Panther Park, off Brooklyn Bridge Road. He would work his way from the infield towards center field as a way to increase his arm strength on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

"I just threw it to the backstop. It saves me from having to call someone to come and catch me. I just drive up there and bring a bucket of balls," he said.

He would also lift weights six times a week, alternating days between lower and upper body exercises. Stewart also ran two miles nearly every day. "Everything has been going good. I am so excited to get ready to play," Stewart said.

Stewart helped lead Pallotti to MIAA B division titles in 2005 and 2006. In 2008, as a sophomore at Northwest Shoals, he was 9-2 on the mound and helped the team win a conference title. He attracted the attention of several major college programs in the deep South but signed on at the College of Charleston, where he is a business major.

He had shoulder surgery June 2008 in Alabama under the care of Dr. James Andrews, who has operated on hundreds of pro athletes, including several MLB pitchers. By coincidence, the same day Stewart had surgery Andrews also operated on John Smoltz, a long-time pitcher for the Atlanta Braves. Smoltz made his debut with the Boston Red Sox earlier this season at Nationals Park in Washington, but was designated for assignment Aug. 7 by the Red Sox the day after he was hit hard by the Yankees.

"He is a real nice guy. I am a big fan of his," Stewart said of Smoltz, whom he got to chat with during his visit to see Andrews.

Stewart missed last season but hopes to land a starting spot in the Cougar rotation in 2010. At the Division I level, top teams play against league opponents in a three-game series on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Normally the Friday night starter is the top pitcher.

Jesse Simpson, the Friday night starter for College of Charleston this past spring, was drafted by the St. Louis Cardinals in June. One of the Saturday starters was a junior college transfer and the Sunday starter was a freshman, David Peterson, who was drafted out of high school by the Reds in 2008 but decided to attend College of Charleston. Stewart feels he has a good chance to land one of the three weekend spots.

"That is my goal, to be one of the top guys," Stewart said.

His head coach, Monte Lee, played minor league ball with the St. Louis Cardinals organization and was an assistant on two College World Series teams at the University of South Carolina. Lee has high hopes for Stewart in 2010 and pitching coach Dan Roszel feels Stewart has the potential to be drafted one day.

"We want to take it slow with him. We are expecting him to be a big part of our pitching staff," Lee said Aug. 10. "He was one of our bigger recruits last year. We hope he will be at 100 percent. Our three weekend starters will be up for grabs. We expect Travis to be a big part of our staff."

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