

Salt Lake pitcher Loux rediscovers fun in game

Kurt Kragthorpe, *The Salt Lake Tribune*—June 10, 2008

His shortest outing of the season had ended long ago, but Salt Lake Bees pitcher Shane Loux was not rushing out of the clubhouse.

Considering how he had just worked 4 2/3 more innings than he pitched professionally all of last season, Loux could speak rationally amid the disappointment of a recent game the Bees eventually lost in 11 innings. Something about having his career taken away helps Loux understand that not everything plays out perfectly in baseball, even if it pretty much did for him and the Bees in April.

The team once was 21-1 and Loux was 4-0 with a 1.40 ERA. His first loss of the season ended the Bees' 13-game winning streak, and they have played only .500 baseball since then, during a parade of player transactions involving the parent Los Angeles Angels. Loux (pronounced "Lukes") will take a 7-3 record and 4.33 ERA into tonight's game with Tacoma at Franklin Covey Field.

"The baseball gods are bringing us back around," Loux said.

Thankfully, they're also giving him another chance this season, and he's responding.

Loux was out of pro baseball last year after Seattle voided his contract, citing a medical condition. At 28, having won one major league game as a former second-round draft choice by Detroit, he knew his career might be over. Loux coached youth teams affiliated with the gym where he worked out, joined a high school coaching staff in suburban Phoenix and played infield, outfield and catcher in a recreational league before landing a tryout with the Angels.

That helps explain how the rough outing two weeks ago was not going to crush him. And he has bounced back with two solid starts, earning a victory and a no-decision in a game the Bees won.

"I really appreciate the highs, and realize the lows aren't quite as bad as I thought they were," Loux said. "When I don't do well, I can handle it better. . . . I can accept it and work on it and move on, instead of throwing stuff and breaking stuff - sometimes, I used to react that way. It's easier to be an adult about it, now that I understand what I'm playing for."

This is baseball, after all. Sure, it's a form of employment for these guys, a career opportunity that means any Triple-A team is assembled from 24 individual agendas. Loux's quest is no different from anybody else's in the Bees' clubhouse, but he's the only one wearing a Chandler Wolves T-shirt under his jersey.

Being around those high school players who raked and watered their own field every day before practices or games "really brought that back to me that, man, these kids play for fun," Loux said.

The April night when he pitched seven scoreless innings at Tucson, in front of several Chandler players who had made the 100-mile drive, was one of Loux's favorite moments this season.

He's hoping to delay the end of his career, obviously. But more than that, he's a starting pitcher who wants proper closure. After coming back from a year's absence following reconstructive arm surgery to pitch for Kansas City's Triple-A team in 2006, Loux signed with Seattle, only to have the Mariners rescind the offer. It seems the organization understood "Tommy John" surgery, but not fasciotomy - a procedure Loux underwent in an effort to improve circulation in his legs. "It was supposed to fix everything," he said, "but all it did was cause problems."

So he was out of work and so disillusioned with baseball that he could not even stand to watch games on television. But not finished.

"He wasn't ready to give up until he heard those words, 'You're not good enough,' " said Rich Barker.

A former Chicago Cubs pitcher, Barker runs the Velocity Sports Performance facility where Loux was casually throwing one day last fall. "You should be in the big leagues right now," Barker said.

Barker called an Angels scout in the Phoenix area and arranged a tryout at the team's spring training facility that eventually resulted in a contract offer, bringing Loux to Salt Lake.

"He's a pretty strong-willed guy," said Chandler coach Jon Watson, a longtime friend. "His big thing is he wants to prove to himself that he can still do it."

Or not. Really, Loux just wants to find out, whatever the answer is.

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