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Not your typical baseball player

By Brent Paz
Of the Emerald

Kyle Etchison doesn't look like he fits the mold of your typical youth from a tough neighborhood who rises from his bad environment to become a top flight pitching prospect.

The Duck pitcher is clean cut, tall with hazel eyes, soft spoken and hardly resembles anyone out of the gang movie "The Warriors." However, things could have been different if the people around his neighborhood didn't refer to him as "Kyle the baseball player."

"I have a lot of friends who are dead because of getting shot," Etchison says about the environment of Baldwin Park, Calif. near East Los Angeles, where the six-foot-two 190 pound righthander grew up among spray painted graffiti on the walls and the burns on the street.

"I played baseball because I didn't want to stay there," the Eugene born native says. "It was something to do besides walk around town and do nothing."

Despite the adversity of the harsh backdrop, Etchison escaped from his neighborhood influence because of his baseball skills. The Oregon Club Sports baseball pitcher's talent has developed to the point that he signed a letter of intent to pitch for Jack Dunn's Portland State Vikings next year. The scholarship came after having some impressive pitching performances against the elite baseball teams of the Nor-

thern Division of the Pac-10. And the gangs of the Pac-10 aren't especially nice people either.

Etchison began his baseball odyssey when he moved to California at the age of three after being born in Eugene. At Sierra Vista High School in California, Etchison led his teams to the state baseball playoffs, only to lose in the semifinals and quarterfinals each season. From there he went to Mt. San Antonio Community College in Walnut, Calif. to play ball. He was a modest 12-6 for his career at Mt. San Antonio, but no major colleges came knocking at his door. It seemed his baseball career had come to an end until he decided to come back to Eugene to work for the summer.

"I just came for the summer to see my dad for awhile," Etchison says. "I played for a semi-pro team, Abby's, and went 9-2 pitching while the team finished second."

"My friend, Mike Perkins, the catcher told me about this team for next year," Etchison explained after he discovered Oregon would have a club sports baseball team. He discussed the possibilities of playing with a few other players and decided "It was better than not playing at all."

At first the righthander's exploits went unnoticed on the club team. Things changed quickly after Etchison and the Ducks made some waves at a baseball tournament in Portland involving the big wigs of the NorPac. Etchison knocked off eventual league champion Oregon State and everyone began to take a serious look at the pitcher, especially PSU's coach Jack Dunn.

"We didn't know who he was in the Pac-10 tournament," Dunn says. "He beat OSU and pitched well against our team which was hitting

.301 for the year. He left the game with the score tied at 3-3 in the late innings."

"We were looking for a front line pitcher for next year to try to rebuild our pitching," Dunn says. "He showed us good velocity and changes speed very well. He should fill one of our gaps."

The PSU bound hurler was surprised by the attention his pitching received after posting a 7-3 mark with 2.59 ERA for the Ducks with victories over OSU and Washington.

"I didn't plan on anything happening. I didn't think anyone would look at us and follow us," Etchison says. "Then we started winning and the newspaper comes out, then the TV."

Duck coach Larry Hanson was "not a bit" surprised on the junior's scholarship to PSU. "He pitched great and was one of the best pitchers in the Northwest," Hanson says. "His potential is unlimited."

According to Hanson, Etchison's talent was tapped by pitching coach Brian Anderson.

"He is basically a good pitcher who throws strikes," Anderson says. "He beat the good teams (OSU and Washington) and his best asset is that he has command of all his pitches."

Etchison's rags to riches saga will have him pitching on the mound of Civic Stadium in Portland next spring. "It is a great place, Civic Stadium," Etchison says with anticipation. "I want to win that league and go down and play USC and Arizona State."

"I hate leaving Larry (Hanson) and Brian (Anderson) because they did so much for me. I feel bad," Etchison says. "I'm glad, too, because look what they are going to do now. Everyone is interested in it (baseball team) and I know they will have it back in a couple years."

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