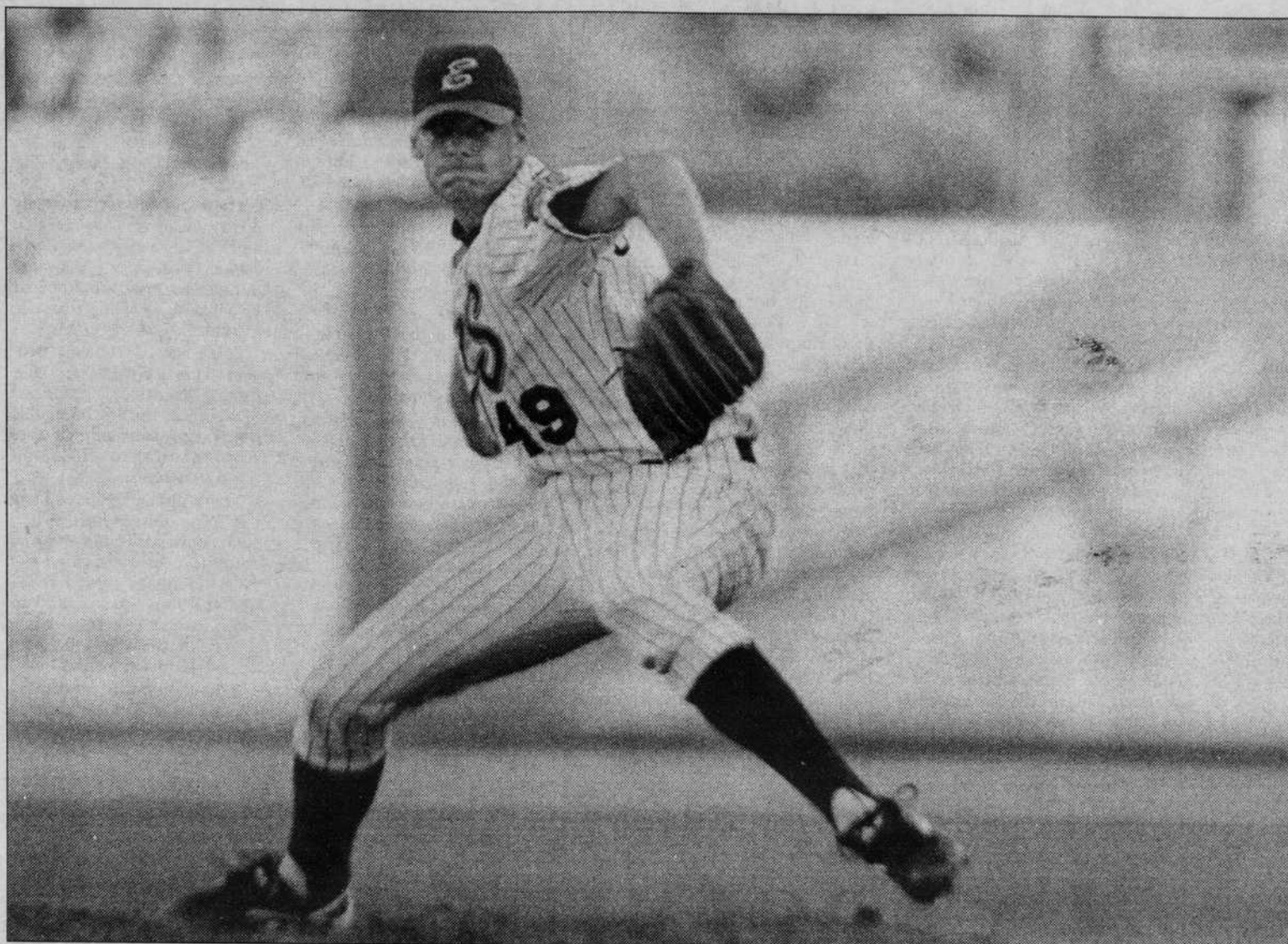




Best Bet
Major League Baseball
Atlanta vs. Pittsburgh
4 p.m., TBS

SPORTS



Ben Christensen, the Chicago Cubs' No. 1 draft pick this spring, faces unique obstacles in his development as a professional athlete.

Catharine Kendall/Emerald

Pitcher's past no problem with Emeralds

Former-Wichita State ace Ben Christensen's career took a bit when he beamed an on-deck batter with a fastball in late April

By Mirjam Swanson
Oregon Daily Emerald

When Ben Christensen, then the ace of the Wichita State pitching staff, took the mound against Florida State on March 5, he was riled up.

Florida State is a big-name university, with prime-time sports teams that stay lodged at the forefront of America's consciousness. So Christensen — now a member of the Eugene Emeralds — looked forward to whatever challenge the eventual national champions might provide him that day.

It turned out Christensen, already a hot prospect on the radar of major-league scouts from coast to coast, couldn't be challenged. Not even by the mighty, top-ranked Seminoles.

Christensen's Shockers, ranked No. 13 at the time, shut down Florida State, 8-1. He struck out six in seven strong innings.

"I'll tell you, on that day, we were the best team in the country," Christensen said last week. "Not just me pitching against them, but our team played so well."

"And it was fun, 'cause in high school you see the big-name teams and ever since I got to Wichita State, I never got to pitch against one. That was the first real big-name team that I pitched against. I was so pumped for that game."

Undoubtedly, his fiery competitiveness is part of what made Christensen so attractive to scouts. Not only can the 6-foot-4 right-hander throw over 90-mph consistently and accurately and mix in a breaking pitch called a "slurve" (a combination of a slider and a curve), but he's a gamer.

Every time he takes the mound, he brings his determination with him. And he's coachable, more than eager to improve his game, and thereby his stock. A physical education/exercise science major, he was on the Wichita State athletic director's honor roll three straight years. What scouts saw, simply, was a winner.

Christensen's career record going into a game on April 23 was an astounding 21-1.

Not surprisingly, there was consensus: Christensen was one of the top three college pitchers and a certain top-10 draft pick.

Then, in the blink of an eye, all of those stable, obvious ideals imploded.

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Countless media reports told the story like this: On

April 23, Christensen was on the mound, throwing warm-up pitches before the start of the Shockers' game against Evansville. Meanwhile, Anthony Molina, Evansville's lead-off batter, made his way from the on-deck circle toward the batters' box, seemingly in an effort to time Christensen's pitches before going to bat.

According to unwritten baseball protocol, batters aren't supposed to do that. Molina probably knew so. Christensen definitely did.

If the scene was at all like a typical Christensen outing, the lanky pitcher had his game face on and was ready to go to battle — because that's what coaches teach players: "This is your field. That's your plate. You own that hitter."

Christensen took notice as Molina crept closer. Pending civil litigation restricts Christensen from commenting on the matter, so he can't say what he was thinking as he watched his opponent approach an invisible line of baseball etiquette, toe it and then step over.

But whatever was in the pitcher's mind — irritation, anger, rage? — he too bypassed a line, one of compassion and common sense. Possibly recalling what Shockers' pitching coach Brent Kemnitz told him to do in such a situation, Christensen threw at Molina.

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Pair of Oregon golfers qualify for the U.S. Amateur

Senior Ryan Lavoie won his second tournament of the summer by taking first place at the Washington State Amateur Golf Championship on July 31.

On the fourth day of competition, Lavoie shot his second consecutive three-under-par 68, giving him a 274 total. That score placed him three strokes ahead of runner-up Troy Kelly of Washington.

Lavoie's total was 10 under par for the

72-hole, 6,821-yard Fort Lewis course. Lavoie, from Pasco, Wash., also recorded a 68 on the first day of play, which initially put him in the lead. Heading into the final round, he was two shots behind and in third place.

Lavoie qualified on July 28 for the U.S. Amateur by finishing four strokes under par at 136 (69-67) at the Whispering Firs course in Olympia, Wash. The U.S. Ama-

teur will take place on August 16-22 in Pebble Beach, Calif.

Andrew Tredway also qualified for the U.S. Amateur. Tredway, a senior from Ashland, shot a nine-under-par 135 (70-65) at the OGA Members Course in Woodburn on July 27 to qualify.

In June, Lavoie was the only member of the Ducks who participated at all four days on competition at the NCAA Champi-

onships at the Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn. He tied for 23rd at the prestigious 72-hole course, shooting a 12-over-par-300.

The Ducks were ranked among the top 25 teams in the nation most of last season, including a No. 15 ranking going into the NCAA Championship, thanks in part to strong performances by both Lavoie and Tredway.