

NAUGHTON: Earned Gonzaga scholarship offer worth 60 percent of the cost of attendance

Continued from 1B

school teams around the country as well as professional players such as former Buckaroo and current Miami Marlins pitcher Dan Straily.

In Naughton's Driveline workouts, he utilizes their weighted ball system that helps strengthen the arm and shoulder as well as build overall arm strength and velocity. He still does the workouts every Monday, Wednesday and Friday throughout the year.

"Once he started doing Driveline, we noticed not just the velocity but no more soreness as well," Rob said. "But the velocity started coming up and up and he started hitting 80 miles-per-hour as a freshman and I thought 'There's something here' and we started tracking and charting and setting goals."

When Naughton began his junior season for the Buckaroos, his fastball was steadily around 84 mph. Then over the course of the next few months, his fastball kept increasing into the high 80s until eventually hitting 90. Every rise in velocity led to a rise in confidence.

"(Daniel) was always a good pitcher, but he steadily hit his spots better and could hit any pitch at any count," Duso said.

Which led to his crazy summer. Naughton wrapped up a junior season where statistically speaking



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Pendleton junior Justin Duso, left, and senior Daniel Naughton, right, talk with former Pendleton baseballer and current George Fox player Brian Branstetter during a workout Wednesday in Pendleton. Branstetter occasionally drops in and works out with the high schoolers.

he was an average pitcher. He threw 33 innings in 10 games, sporting a 4.66 earned run average with 43 strikeouts and 26 walks with 36 hits allowed.

He was setting his sights on college baseball, but at the time held what seemed like more realistic options for his top choices — schools like Mt. Hood Community College, Linn-Benton Community College, and Central Washington.

But his expectations began to

shift after earning an invitation to the Area Code Tryouts, a Major League Baseball-sanctioned event, at the University of Portland campus on June 26. There, Naughton threw a bullpen session in front of dozens of MLB and college scouts, showing off his fastball velocity as well as an improved curveball.

"It was almost scary," Naughton said of the experience, "because you could see every single one of them looking right at you. But all the kids

there were at a whole 'nother level and it felt good to be there, too."

There, he caught the eye of Gonzaga's coaching staff and exchanged conversations soon after. Things took off on July 1 when Naughton pitched in a legion game for Hodgen Distributing in a tournament up in Spokane against the 19U Spokane North Stars — a team that had defeated Hodgen just a few weeks prior.

"I told coach (TJ Haguewood) that's the team I want to pitch against and I want to beat them," Naughton recalled.

And he did just that. Naughton led Hodgen to an 8-0 victory where he threw a five-inning no-hitter and struck out 12 batters with just one walk. And he did so in front of Gonzaga's associate head coach Danny Evans, who came to the game to watch Naughton.

The next day, Naughton visited Gonzaga and fell in love with the campus, and then was handed a scholarship offer worth 60 percent of the cost of attendance.

"It was exhilarating," Naughton recalled of the moment Gonzaga offered him. "It felt so good and instantly boosted my mood, my confidence, everything."

Gonzaga did not have the national baseball cachet of a school like Oregon State, but it has built up a solid program in the West

Coast Conference under head coach Mark Machtolf. The Bulldogs have averaged 30.3 wins per season over the past 10 years, including a 69-41 (.627) record over the past two seasons.

The winning culture, the close proximity of campus to home, and the relationship with the coaches made it a no-brainer for Naughton to accept the offer on July 12 and commit to the Bulldogs.

"The campus, how friendly the coaches are, the class sizes at Gonzaga are small and the campus is student-friendly," Naughton said of his thought process. "If you get a degree from Gonzaga, you're going to do well in life and that was my main reason."

Rob said he is extremely proud of what his son has accomplished this summer.

"I knew Daniel was a college baseball talent, but I didn't know that a D-I college like Gonzaga would come right out of the gate and put all their cards on the table as quickly as they did," he said. "Getting the grand slam offer right out of the gate was pretty cool. And this kind of thing is rare for a kid from Umatilla County so we're really proud of him."

Contact Eric at esinger@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0839. Follow him on Twitter @ByEricSinger.

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