

ISLAND SPORTS

If you were to ask John Farrell what initially drew him to the game of baseball his answer would most likely come in the form of an, "I don't know."

"When my brothers and I were young our father always encouraged us to participate in a variety of sports," said Farrell. "One year when I was little I decided I wanted to play tee ball at the Boys and Girls Club," and a love affair still in existence today blossomed between Farrell and the game of baseball. Since that day some fifteen years ago, Farrell has gone on to excel in each level of his baseball career, from Little League through high school, and now in college.

Farrell is coming off his third season as a starting pitcher for the Division I independent Longwood University Lancers out of Farmville, Virginia. In 42 career appearances for the Lancers, Farrell has amassed an 11-11 record with a 3.91 career earned run average, while boasting 128 strikeouts in 197.1 innings of work. He is coming off his most successful season, going 5-3 with a 3.63 ERA and recording 39 strikeouts in 69.1 innings of work.

Farrell's successful numbers come as no surprise to anyone privileged enough to see him play on Nantucket, where he flourished on the baseball diamond. But the impressive numbers also come as no surprise to those working with Farrell now, namely Rick Blanc, the pitching coach for the Lancers who has worked closely with Farrell on the mound over his past three years on the team.

"John has an amazing work ethic; he is one of the hardest working players on our team," Blanc said in a telephone interview last week. "His first year with us was tough, we were a young team in our first year at the division one level, and we relied heavily on John to step up and shoulder a lot of innings and responsibility as a pretty green freshman."

In his first year with the Lancers, Farrell saw a career high 72.2 innings of work as the team's number two starter. "It was a tough spot for any pitcher to be in, never mind a freshman pitcher on a young team," Blanc notes. Blanc continued to emphasize the toughness of Farrell, not only physically but mentally, and how that toughness contributed to his contin-

FLOURISHING IN FARMVILLE

FORMER WHALER PITCHER JOHN FARRELL FINDS SUCCESS IN COLLEGE BALL

by Josh Galvin • Independent Intern



John Farrell's mound mastery has translated into three years of Division I varsity baseball, with a fourth yet to come.

ued success with Longwood's baseball program.

"John had a slow start to his sophomore year, but he kept his head up and battled to become a better all-around pitcher. He was always physically there and had the right mechan-

ics and tools, but he matured a lot and really became a student of the game and learned how to pitch not using just his physical attributes but his mental ones as well."

Farrell equates that mental toughness with the pitching position itself.

"Now that I'm pitching at a higher level, I get to focus all of my energy on pitching, which has obviously made me a much better player. I've always loved being a pitcher and having the pressure and control to dictate how a game will unfold. A pitcher needs to be able to handle a lot of pressure and attention, and it is hard, but at the same time that is what really excites me about the position. Every time I start I have a direct say in how the game will go."

While pitching for the Whalers at Nantucket High School, he sported a career ERA below 1.00, was voted team most valuable player three straight years, and set school records for strikeouts in a game (18) and in a season (127). But unless you played on the team or followed closely as a spectator, Farrell's accolades may have gone unnoticed. The modest all star nods and cracks a smile at the list of statistics and sways the conversation. "I've been lucky to have the success I've had with the game, it really has given me a lot," he says. "I'm mostly thankful for what baseball has allowed me to experience because of the time and effort I have put into it."

Baseball has carried Farrell around the country, from playing on Nantucket, to Florida, Texas and even Hawaii. "I've really been lucky to have the chance to play where I have and with so many great baseball players," Farrell said of his time spent playing for teams like Longwood, the College Park Bombers of the Cal Ripken Senior Collegiate League (where Farrell has played the past two summers) and on the Cape Cod Babe Ruth League All Star team that Farrell led to the Babe Ruth World Series in Texas in 2003. "As much as I have put into the game in terms of practice and study it has given me back so much more."

Farrell will be entering his senior year this fall and is looking at his last year of collegiate baseball. While expecting to graduate with a degree in business finance, Farrell isn't sure if he's quite ready to say goodbye to the game he loves.

"It would be great to get drafted by a big league team, but if I can't play in the states I would like to try out maybe for a Japanese team, I just don't think I'll be ready to say goodbye to baseball after just one more year." ■