

Freese ready to sign; Puk ready for college

Written by Jim Ecker

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Dakota Freese and Chad Christensen are getting ready to pack their bags and sign pro baseball contracts.

A.J. Puk will be packing his bags soon too, but he'll be leaving Cedar Rapids to play college baseball at the University of Florida.

All three Cedar Rapids Washington graduates were selected in the Major League draft Saturday.

Freese, a 2011 Washington grad, was picked in the 12th round by the Oakland A's and plans to report to rookie camp in Arizona on Monday.

"I feel amazing," said Freese, a 6-foot-4 righthander. "I'm ready to go and play for this team and hopefully go high (in the minor leagues) this year."

Christensen, a 2009 Washington grad, was selected in the 25th round by the Minnesota Twins following his senior campaign at Nebraska. He plans to fly to Minnesota's training camp in Fort Myers, Fla., on Thursday and begin his pro baseball career, with an eye on playing for the Cedar Rapidsernels some day.

"I'm super excited about it," said Christensen, an all-Big Ten outfielder this year. "It's a great organization. The chance to play in Cedar Rapids in awhile would be great."

Puk, a lefthanded pitcher who graduated from Washington this year, was ranked fairly high on Major League draft lists, but he informed all of the MLB teams before the draft that he would attend Florida.

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The Detroit Tigers picked him in the 35th round anyway, but he said there's no chance he'll sign a pro contract.

"It's 100 percent Florida," he said.

Puk plans to leave for Florida on June 22 to get ready for summer school. He said he'll play baseball for the Washington Warriors this coming week, then take a week off before heading south.

Jon Keller, a righthander who graduated from Xavier in 2010, was drafted by the Baltimore Orioles in the 22nd round. He was a junior at the University of Tampa this year and has one more year of college eligibility.

Keller could not be reached for comment Saturday night about his plans. He could either sign or return to school.

Andrew Hanse, a Linn-Mar graduate and a righthanded pitcher, was selected by Tampa Bay in the 22nd round. Hanse was a senior at the University of Iowa this year and will get a chance to play pro ball.

Puk might have been selected in the first five rounds of the draft, according to draft experts, but decided about three weeks ago that he'd rather go to college and wait for his next draft opportunity in 2016.

"I just sat down and decided what I wanted to do. I wanted to go to college," he said.

Puk is a 6-foot-7 lefthanded pitcher and first baseman. Major League teams had him listed as a pitcher on their draft charts, but he'd like to keep his options open as a hitter as well.

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"There's no doubt in my mind that if I go to Florida I'm going to get better as a pitcher," he said. "I'd like to hit, too, and down there I'll be a two-way player right from the start.

"The question between pitching and hitting will be resolved at Florida."

Puk did not pay much attention to the draft after informing MLB teams of his decision to attend Florida.

"I was actually playing golf when I got the phone call," he said. "I was surprised. I wasn't expecting it. But it's a good feeling being selected. It's an honor."

Puk told MLB teams how much money it would take to sign him away from Florida, according to his mother. "He gave them a number, which was up there, and expressed that he wanted to play at Florida," said Chris Puk, who declined to reveal the amount.

Freese, a 6-foot-4 righthander, has more college eligibility if he wants it, but said he's definitely ready to sign with Oakland after pitching at DMACC this season.

"I'm so ready," he exclaimed. "I've been ready for awhile."