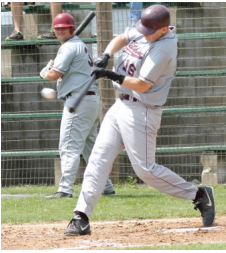


Utley glad he stuck with baseball

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 02 August 2014 19:33 - Last Updated Saturday, 02 August 2014 20:06



WATKINS - DJ Utley thought his baseball career was over when he graduated from Cedar Rapids Prairie in 2011, but in reality it was just beginning.

He had a monster year as a senior at Prairie when he hit .441 with 14 homers and 50 RBIs and made the IHSBCA Super Team, but by then he'd already decided to quit baseball and pursue an engineering degree at Iowa State.

"I wasn't really recruited until my senior year," he said Saturday. "My senior year I had a good year, but I had already made up my mind before the season even started I was going to go to Iowa State, and so that's what I stuck with."

Utley lasted one semester at Iowa State. He played for the club team at ISU and realized he left the game too soon.

"I decided I wanted to play baseball again. I missed it," he said.

Utley called the coaches at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) in Boone and asked for a tryout. They had expressed interest in him at Prairie and offered him a spot on the team.

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Utley played at DMACC for two seasons and then transferred to Wartburg College, where he had another monster season this year. He hit .407 with seven home runs and 37 RBIs and was named the Iowa Conference Position Player of the Year.

Utley also compiled a 2-2 record and 4.58 ERA on the mound for the Knights. He would play the first three games of a weekend series at first base, then pitch a game.

Utley, a 6-foot-4 left-handed batter, led the Iowa Conference in on-base percentage and home runs, finished second in batting average and slugging percentage, third in doubles, fourth in RBIs and seventh in base hits.

"I'm happy with that. Absolutely," he said. "I'll do as much as I can for the team. That's all you can ask for, I guess."

Utley is playing for the Watkins Mudhens in the Iowa Valley League this summer for the third time. He went 1-for-3 Saturday and played right field as the Mudhens blanked the Muscatine Flames, 3-0, in the opening round of the IABA state tournament in Watkins.

Utley still wants to be an engineering and expects to get his degree in engineering science from Wartburg next year. He has an engineering internship at General Mills in Cedar Rapids this summer while playing ball for Watkins.



Utley said he really enjoys playing for Watkins, which has one of the top summer teams in the state.

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"It's a family environment," he said. "This team has been around forever and it's nice to be part of something bigger than you. It's another family out here."

The Watkins field sits across the street from railroad tracks and giant silos, with corn peeking over the outfield fence. Utley said he plans to keep playing for Watkins after he graduates from college if he possibly can.

"If I'm around the around, absolutely I'm playing for Watkins," he said. "For as long as I can. I love it out here."

Utley quit playing the game once before. He doesn't plan to make the same mistake again.