

## Stewart nixed Texas A&M for Twins

Written by Jim Ecker  
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Kohl Stewart had a chance to become the next "Johnny Football" at Texas A&M, but he elected to skip college and pitch for the Minnesota Twins organization instead.

The talented 6-foot-3 righthander had more than 4.5 million reasons to pick baseball instead of trying to succeed Heisman Trophy winner Johnny Manziel as the Texas A&M quarterback.

Stewart committed to the Aggies for football and baseball during his high school career in Texas, but Minnesota made him the No.4 overall pick in the 2013 amateur draft and gave him \$4,544,400 to sign on the dotted line.

He's now a starting pitcher with the Cedar Rapids Kernels in the Class A Midwest League and is scheduled to start Sunday afternoon in Game 4 of the season-opening series with Clinton.

Manziel won the Heisman Trophy as a freshman at Texas A&M in 2012 and turned pro following his sophomore year of 2013. Stewart would have been a freshman at Texas A&M this year, trying to succeed Manziel at quarterback, but baseball intervened.

He flirted with the idea of playing quarterback for the Aggies.

"I would have been nice," he said Monday after the Kernels arrived in Cedar Rapids. "I have a couple of buddies right now down there (at A&M) fighting for it. We'll see how that works out."

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He originally planned to play football and baseball at Texas A&M. He said the decision to play pro baseball became easier as his senior year at St. Pius X High School in Houston went along.

"At the beginning of my senior year I had no idea what was going to happen, but as the dominoes started to fall, the opportunity (to play baseball) became very apparent. I never second-guessed it once I made it.

"I prayed about it a lot," he said. "I had a lot of people in my ear, (telling me) what they thought I should do. My family helped me keep level-headed and made decisions."

Both of Stewart's parents attended Texas A&M. His older brother graduated from A&M and his older sister is a senior there now, so the Stewart family has Aggie blood in their veins.

Stewart was the first high school player selected in the 2013 draft. He gave a taste of what he could do in pro ball last summer when he compiled a 1.35 ERA in seven games in the Gulf Coast League and Appalachian League with 24 strikeouts and only four walks in 20 innings.

"He's got the big arm. There's no doubt about it," Kernels Manager Jake Mauer said Monday. "He's pretty efficient with what he does with his work.

He goes right at guys.

"I'm sure he's going to be wound up the first time he's out there and excited and want to be Superman, but he's going to be a pretty good pitcher.

"You wouldn't bring a 19-year-old kid to the Midwest League if you didn't think he was ready to compete and do well," said Mauer.

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Stewart said he does not miss football and is excited about taking the next step in his baseball career. He's aware of the hype and expectations, but feels like he's prepared to deal with it.

Stewart, 19, pitched in only one game for Elizabethton in the Appalachian League last summer and essentially skipped a step in coming to Cedar Rapids this season.

"I feel like they expect a lot out of me and I need to prove that I belong here," he said. "The goal is even to be out of here and hopefully prove that I can play at a higher level.

"I'm excited that they believe in me and put me here. It's my job now to prove they made a good decision."

Stewart said he throws a fastball, curveball, slider, changeup and sinker. "Sometimes the stuff is really good and sometimes it's not," he said. "You have to get through it."

Stewart met Manziel when they both visited Texas A&M in high school and they spent some time together after Manziel became the Aggies' star quarterback. "He's a good guy," said Stewart. "Yeah, he's a real good dude."

Stewart will never know if he could have been "The Next Johnny Football," but he's excited about his shot with the Kernels and Minnesota Twins.

"I'm looking forward to the season," he said. "Hopefully we'll have a lot of fun and win some games.

"This is a dream for me. It's something I've worked my whole life at. It's right here. I might as well go after it."

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