

RIDER'S Boys of SUMMER

Kevin Barry '01 leads a crop of four former Broncos playing professional baseball

By Cliff Olsen '98 (journ.) and Brian J. Kelley '97 (journ.)

A coach's legacy is connected with wins and losses and during the 34 years that **Sonny Pittaro** served as Rider's baseball coach, the Broncos won their share of games and conference titles. However, beyond the final scores and championships, Pittaro built a solid foundation to a winning program that molded young men on and off the field, giving them an opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream of playing Major League Baseball.

While few players ever get a chance to make it to what they call "The Show," four former Rider players are currently on the path to making that dream a reality.

Kevin Barry '01 (bus. admin.), who completed his fourth minor-league season as a relief pitcher in the Atlanta Braves organization this past September, was promoted June 7 to Class AAA Richmond (VA), putting him a step away from the majors. Outfielder **Carl Loadenthal '03** (comm.), an outfielder with the Braves' rookie-level club in Danville, VA, and **James Hoey**, a pitcher with the Baltimore Orioles' Class A affiliate in Aberdeen, MD, finished their second year of professional baseball. The latest Rider player to join the professional ranks is **Scott Rich '04** (comm.), an outfielder who was selected by the New York Yankees on June 8 in the 21st round of this year's first-year player draft and assigned to short-season Class A Staten Island. As a result, Rich became the 41st and final Rider player under Pittaro to sign a professional contract.

Now retired from the coaching ranks, Pittaro can sit back and watch the latest products of his Rider coaching career. "It's



Photo courtesy of the Greenville Braves

Kevin Barry '01, pictured here playing for the Double-A Greenville Braves, was promoted June 7 to Triple-A Richmond, one step away from the major leagues.



Photo by Mike Scott '02

Staten Island Yankees outfielder Scott Rich '04 waits for a pitch in the first inning of a June 29 game at Aberdeen, MD. Rich finished the at-bat with a double high off the left-center field wall.

always nice to see your kids get an opportunity to play pro ball," said Pittaro. "I feel really good for them that they're playing at this level. The pros are where they want to be." The right-handed Barry, 26, was originally picked by the Oakland Athletics in the 15th round of the draft after his junior year. When the two sides could not agree on financial terms, he returned for his senior season in Lawrenceville and went on to graduate with what was then the all-time Rider career strikeout record (262). The Princeton Junction, NJ, native earned All-Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference honors three times, while posting a record of 20-12, becoming one of just six Broncs in the 62-year history of the sport to compile 20 victories.

Following his final collegiate campaign, the Braves selected Barry in the 14th round in 2001. "Looking back at it now, I think it was one of the best decisions I ever made in my life," said Barry, referring to coming back to Rider for his senior season. "I mean now, it is basically icing on the cake for me. I have my

degree so if anything ever does go wrong physically, I have my degree to go back and get a job just like everyone else."

The 6-foot-2, 210-pound Barry knows the fortunate situation he is in, but he does admit that life in the minor leagues is not exactly perfect. "The money situation is terrible; you don't get paid at all down here," said Barry, who like all minor leaguers, battles through a challenging schedule that includes long bus rides, extended road trips and a lot of time away from his family. "But you are playing a game, so you really can't expect to get paid a lot of money. It is enough to basically make ends meet and that's it."

Barry, who was still playing for Class AA Greenville, NC, at the time of his interview with Rider University magazine in Jacksonville, FL, talked about the excitement of seeing current Atlanta Braves first baseman Adam LaRoche get promoted within the system. "I was with Adam here last year when he got called up to Triple-A. It is always in the back of your head; when the chance is

yours, you have to take it.

"Right now I have to concentrate on continuing to do well at the level I am at in order to move up," said Barry, who compiled a 9-6 record with a 3.14 earned run average (ERA) and 43 saves in 127 relief appearances for short-season Class A Jamestown, high Class A Myrtle Beach and Class AA Greenville from 2001 through 2003. He returned to Greenville for 2004 and went 2-1 with a 0.76 ERA and four saves in 19 games before being sent to Richmond. Barry, who recorded a win in his Triple-A debut at Toledo on June 7, wound up going 3-3 with a 2.52 ERA and two saves while striking out 40 and walking 25 in 30 appearances for Richmond. Including five post-season games in which he pitched, Barry did not give up a run in his last 17 appearances (18 consecutive scoreless innings) of the year. He was also named the International League's Pitcher of the Week for the final week of the regular season.

These accomplishments have not gone unnoticed by the Braves' front



Photo courtesy of the Danville Braves

"You have to be patient. If you don't love it, it's tough to get through it. But it's worth the chance to play in just one major league game."

—Carl Loadenthal '03

office. However, it hasn't always been easy for Barry, who struggled at Greenville early last season. "When you are going through a slump, more than anything it is more mental," he said. "Because it was basically the first time that I went through a slump like that in my professional career, it was something that was very hard to deal with."

He was able to bounce back as he went 3-0 with a 0.63 ERA in his next 23 appearances. "This organization is very good about that," said Barry on the guidance he received during the slump. "Every single coach, roving instructor, and the manager are very helpful. That is why this is a first-class organization."

Atlanta's John Smoltz, who was converted from an ace starting pitcher to a star closer in recent years, is one of the reasons for the Braves' string of 13 straight division titles that included a World Series crown in 1995. "Last spring training, our pitching coordina-

tor, John Smoltz and I talked about my mechanics—some things that (Smoltz) overcame to be such a successful pitcher," Barry said. "It was awesome, he is a great guy."

Advice from a likely future Hall of Famer can only help Barry on his road to Atlanta, which appears to be going well on and off the field. Despite playing in the competitive Arizona Fall League for promising young players last year, the 26-year-old Barry used his limited free time to fly back to New Jersey, where he married his wife, Samantha, at Mercer Oaks in October 2003.

Loadenthal joined Barry in the Braves' organization during the summer of 2003. The outfielder from Southampton, PA, was not selected in last year's major league draft after closing out his Rider career with the school record in runs scored (165) and stolen bases (80). "I was disappointed and kind of shocked at the same time," said Loadenthal on not being picked. "I heard before the draft that teams were interested in me."

However, in the days following the 2003 draft, Loadenthal used a tryout held by the Braves in Baltimore to earn his way into their organization. "I heard about the tryout, but I really wasn't going to go," said Loadenthal. "But a bunch of guys from Rider were going and they talked me into it. I did really well and the rest is history."

Loadenthal was assigned to the rookie-level Gulf Coast League in Florida and continued to excel, batting .310 with a home run, 24 runs batted in (RBI) and 21 stolen bases while helping his team win the league title. He also earned a spot on the GCL All-Star team.

The speedy outfielder says that being an undrafted free agent has one advantage. "It pushes me to work hard everyday and not take anything for granted. I can't give them a reason to get rid of me."

Despite his first-year success, Loadenthal was blocked by other outfielders in the Braves' system from mov-

ing up into a full-season league for 2004. As a result, he was kept in what is called extended spring training before making his season debut in mid-June with rookie-level Danville (VA) in the short-season Appalachian League.

"I'm thankful I'll never have to go through it again," said Loadenthal about the extended spring training. "But I looked at it as extra time to work on things so I could be in mid-season form for when the season started. Plus, being at Danville allows me to get more at-bats. The goal is to eventually get to Atlanta."

Loadenthal helped make that goal more realistic with another solid season, batting .305 with five home runs and 32 RBI while scoring a league-high 60 runs in a team-best 65 games for Danville. The Appalachian League Player of the Week for July 19-25 also earned a spot on the league's All-Star team.

But with so many higher-ranked outfield prospects in the Braves' system, Loadenthal must continue to be patient or hope for a trade to another organization to limit his time in the low minors. "You have to be patient. If you don't love it, it's tough to get through it," said Loadenthal, who is likely to be assigned to either low-A Rome (GA) or high-A Myrtle Beach (SC) in 2005. "But it's worth the chance to play in just one major league game."

Hoey, a right-handed starting pitcher drafted by the Orioles in the 13th round of the 2003 first-year player draft following his junior year at Rider, played for rookie-level Bluefield of the Appalachian League in 2003 and compiled a 2-3 record with a solid 2.79 ERA in 11 games. He was bumped up in 2004 to the Class A Ironbirds—a team owned by former Orioles great Cal Ripken—of the short-season New York-Penn League.

"Bluefield was like college ball in a way," said Hoey. "The competition is different, but the area is more laid back. Here (in Aberdeen) you have a lot more fans."

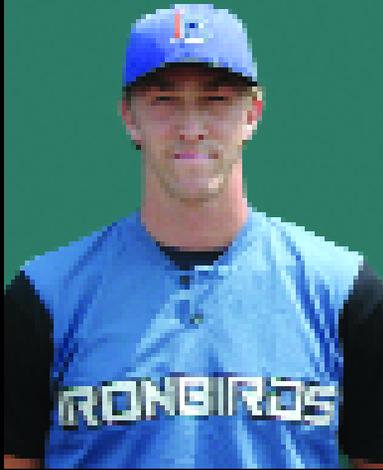


Photo courtesy of the Aberdeen Ironbirds

“I like the excitement of going out to the mound and throwing in front of everyone.”
— James Hoey

Unfortunately, Hoey’s 2004 season ended because of an arm injury after just two starts. He finished 0-1 with a 9.45 ERA, but struck out six and walked only one in 6 2/3 innings of work.

Interestingly, though, Hoey’s first start of the 2004 season had him pitching against the Staten Island Yankees with close friend and former Rider teammate Rich in the lineup. After striking out against Hoey in his first at-bat in the third inning of the June 19 contest, Rich came back and recorded his first professional RBI with a sacrifice fly off Hoey in the fifth inning of what turned out to be an 11-6 win for the “Baby Bombers.”

“It was kind of funny. When I struck him out, I wanted to hide my smile,” said Hoey. “In his second at-bat, he hit that sac fly pretty deep. As he ran by me on his way back to the dugout, he gave me a little wink and I gave him a smile. It was good to see the camaraderie between the two of us, battling it out now.”

Rich adds, “I had faced Jim in high school, was his teammate for three years at Rider and now facing him again in professional baseball. It was exciting for both of us; we were just living in the moment.”



Photo by Mike Scott '02

“The four years at Rider were like already being in the minor leagues. It also helped me with life experiences off the field.”

— Scott Rich '04

Hoey, meanwhile, went on to have a decent outing that day, allowing just one earned run on five hits while striking out four in 4 2/3 innings of work.

Pittaro was at Aberdeen’s Ripken Stadium June 29 for what would have been another showdown between Hoey and Rich, had Hoey not been put on the disabled list earlier in the day. Pittaro said having two former Rider players face each other at the professional level is nothing new.

“A few years back we had (1983 third team All-American) **Jeff Kunkel** and **Bobby O’Connor ’84 (mktg.)** playing against each other in the Texas League,” said Pittaro. “I had a nice picture of Bobby sliding into second base, trying to take out Jeff on a double play. It’s kind of cool, really.”

In the sixth inning of a 2-2 game at Vermont on June 28, Rich hit his first professional home run, a three-run shot that gave the Baby Bombers a 5-2 lead en route to a 6-3 win. Of course, a call to dad was in order that night.

“I was on the Internet trying to get the game results, but they weren’t posted yet,” said Scott’s father, Bob Rich, who was on hand to see his son go 2-for-4 with a double and a homer June 29 at Aberdeen. “I started talking on the phone to a friend of mine and I heard the call-waiting beep. It was Scott, letting me know he hit his first professional home run. Needless to say, I was quite happy.”

The accomplishments of all four players have one common bond—Rider.

“I met a lot of good people, friends

and coaches at Rider,” said Hoey. “You always have that chemistry with them, and you bring that along with you.”

Barry also credited his Rider experience for preparing him for the future. “You can’t take this for granted at all,” he said. “Ultimately, this is a business and if you don’t put up the numbers, you are going to have to find another job.

“(Rider) has been a big part of my life and it helped me grow up as a person,” added Barry. “Rider fulfilled all my needs as a student-athlete. From an athletics standpoint, it helped get me drafted and gave me the opportunity to play in an Atlanta Braves uniform.”

Rich said his Rider experience prepared him not only for life but for the rigors of professional baseball. “The four years at Rider were like already being in the minor leagues. It also really helped me with life experiences off the field.

“Sonny’s tutelage was great,” added Rich. “He’s a great teacher of the game and knows so much about it. You learn the little things.”

It’s those little things that are helping to keep very big dreams alive for four boys of summer. ■

Cliff Olsen resides in High Springs, FL, and now writes for The Alachua County Today newspaper after years of covering high school sports for The Gainesville Sun. He has lived in the Gainesville area since 1999.

Statistics courtesy of *The Sports Network*, via minorleaguebaseball.com.