Seton Hall University Baseball – A Research Paper

By

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When analyzing the history of college baseball in the United States, the majority of powerhouse programs and players come from two major regions of the country: The South and West. The ability to play baseball year round with scouting and coaching readily available allows for these regions to produce great baseball players every year to the major leagues. Schools such as Texas, Cal State Fullerton, Arizona State, and USC have won numerous College World Series championships and produced dozens of Major League All Stars each. One school in Northern New Jersey, however, has found itself among the nations’ elite for over a century. Seton Hall University has a reputation for baseball excellence that dates back to the turn of the 20th Century. Through producing dozens of Major Leaguers that appeared in All Star games and won numerous awards, along with appearing in College World Series in multiple decades, the Seton Hall Baseball program has cemented its place in college baseball history.

New Jersey: many things come to mind when the state is brought into discussion. From malls to the Mafia, beaches to Ivy League Colleges, the state has a reputation all its own. Seton Hall University, nestled in Northern New Jersey just a quick train ride outside the media capital of the world in New York City, is the state’s biggest Catholic University. While it has an excellent reputation in many subject areas and has produced some very prestigious alumni, its athletic tradition is held in the same regard. Although many sports at Seton Hall have great
tradition, the school’s baseball program has been among the nation’s elite for decades. At the beginning of the 20th Century, Baseball was quickly becoming the most popular and beloved sport in the country. Its pace, rhythm, and inexpensive cost to attend allowed for customers to flock through the gates. The game was fundamentally the same as today, with the same distances between bases and the pitcher’s mound as well as the same nine inning/27 out format. But, it was played much differently. Players stole bases and unbelievable rates, routinely racking up totals in triple digits for an entire season. Home runs were not as frequently and pitching dominated. The Seton Hall program reflected the era in many ways.

The first player from Seton Hall to make the Major Leagues for an extended period of time was Jack Ferry. He was a star for the Pirates, hitting cleanup and dominating on the mound. In a game against CCNY on May 4th 1907, Ferry collected four hits in a 12-1 thrashing of their local rival. This was a rarity for the dead ball era, as almost every box score examined from 1890-1910 does not have either team scoring more than three runs in a single contest. This was the just the start for Ferry as he would go on to sign with one of the most dominant teams of the time: The Pittsburgh Pirates. These were the Pirates of Honus Wagner and Ferry pitched for four seasons alongside Wagner, from 1910-13. The Pirates also fielded a pair of brothers, Joe and Red Shannon, who followed in Ferry’s footsteps as future Major Leaguers. From 1914-15, both brothers starred at Seton Hall in the field and at bat. Although Ferry and the Shannon brothers were able to showcase their talents on higher levels of play.

Seton Hall did not have a schedule of opponents from across the country, as is the case in 2014. They found themselves playing mainly against Catholic schools from the New Jersey/New York area. This early schedule also included the occasional series against seminaries.
The program began to assert its dominance on a national level with the hiring of Owen Carroll in the late 1940’s. Carroll, who the Seton Hall baseball field is named after, served as coach from 1948-72. Over this time, the program became a national powerhouse and appeared in multiple College World Series. From analyzing rosters from the Owen Carroll era, it is remarkable to see that nearly all of the players from his teams were from local area. Many of traditional powers have recruiting pools that stretch across the country.

Seton Hall was able to compete with the USC’s and Arizona State’s with players from New Jersey and New York City, including many from South Orange. Two such players from New Jersey went on to Major League fame during the 1940’s and 1950’s: Chuck Connors and Gene Hermanski. Hermanski went on to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers alongside some of the greatest players of the era. This included being in the same lineup during the integration of baseball with Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, and Don Newcomb. Connors played for the Pirates in the early 1940’s and would go onto play in the Majors as well as the NBA. But, he is not known best for his exploits in professional sports as much as his acting career.

Following the success of Connors and Hermanski, Carroll continued to build the program. In 1964, Seton Hall made it all the way to the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska. In one of the first instances of a northeast college baseball team competing at a national level, Seton Hall found itself against traditional powers Ole Miss, USC, Arizona State, Missouri, and Texas A&M. Among the future MLB players competing against SHU in the 1964 College World Series was future Oakland A’s infielder Sal Bando, who would be an entrical part

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of the their World Series teams of the 1970’s.\textsuperscript{2} Although the Pirates did not win the Series, their name was gaining national prominence.

As the 1970’s began, the Pirates were in the national consciousness as a baseball powerhouse. By the end of the decade, they would be considered one of the preeminent programs in the nation. In 1971, Seton Hall once again advanced to the College World Series and found itself among the nation’s elite. The team was loaded with four future MLB draft picks throughout the roster. The Pirates would not advance much further, as a 5-1 loss to USC (led by future 1975 American League MVP Fred Lynn) would knock them out of title contention. It once again proved that the Pirates were here to stay on a national level.

Carroll would leave the program in 1972 in the hands of Mike Sheppard, leaving behind an immense legacy. Sheppard would outdo the accomplishments of Carroll’s teams, making back to back College World Series appearances in 1974-75. The Pirates were led by future Yankee catcher Rick Cerone and pitcher Marty Cafferty, who finished in the top 15 in ERA in the nation during the 1974 campaign. Cerone was named to the all CWS team in 1975 as the only Pirate to make the squad. Also, Greg Jemison ranked 2nd in the nation in stolen bases during the 1974 campaign. In each year, the Pirates could not get out of the initial rounds, ending their storybook runs. Cerone was destined for greener pastures and enjoyed a long career in the Major Leagues. Playing for multiple teams over the late seventies and eighties, he was forced to fill the shoes of replacing Thurman Munson after Munson’s death in 1979.

The Pirates enjoyed one of their greatest eras in the 1980’s with the emergence of many future Major League all-stars. The first of these highly touted prospects was John Morris, who was drafted in the top 10 and in the Majors within a span of months. His professional career did

\textsuperscript{2} Felman, 1.
not merit the same success as his college days, partially due to the World Series appearances. Morris found playing time hard to come by as he was competing with former of the greatest baseball players of the 80’s (Vince Coleman and Willy McGee). Nevertheless, his accomplishments at SHU couldn’t be overstated. 1985 was the freshman season of future Major league all-star Craig Biggio. Over the course of his pirate career, he would showcase the potential that turned into numerous all-star appearances in the 1990’s and 2000’s. He was the team’s starting catcher during his SHU days, leading the pirates to multiple postseason appearances with his bat, legs, glove, and arm. 1985 was also the freshman season of SHU legend Marteese Robinson. Robinson put up massive numbers at Seton Hall, which resulted in being drafted in the 11th round by the Oakland A’s. 1986 saw the debuts of Dana Brown and John Valentin. Both were standouts during their SHU careers, while Valentin exceeded expectations during his major league career with the Boston Red Sox.

Out of all the great Seton Hall players of the 1980’s, only would later be named Most Valuable Player of the American league in their career: Mo Vaughn. He was a multiple recipient of All American honors during his tenure at Seton Hall and would go onto star with the Red Sox, Angels, and Mets. These core players allowed for amazing success in the decade, although none would receive in a College World Series birth.

The Shepard era came to a close in the coming decade and a new era would begin in Seton Hall baseball going into the 21rst century and beyond. Matt Morris and Jason Grilli would become stars in South Orange en route to All Star careers in the Major Leagues. Rob Sheppard would take over for his father and continue an aura of excellence around the program. Overall, the Seton Hall baseball has enjoyed immense success in its history, separating itself into the
upper echelon of College Baseball power programs. The program has much to look forward going forward into the second decade of the 21rst century.

- For further reading on the Seton Hall Baseball program, consult these sources:


  http://dataomaha.com/cws


Works Cited


*Seton Hall Pirates Baseball Boxscores* (South Orange: Seton Hall University, 1890-1972).

*Seton Hall Pirates Baseball Yearbooks* (South Orange: Seton Hall University, 1954-93).

*Seton Hall Pirates Baseball Programs* (South Orange: Seton Hall University, 1948-83).

- The Seton Hall Baseball collection dates back to the late 1800’s and features media guides from the 1950’s onward as well as box scores from the turn of the 20th century. These provided a great deal of information as sources for my research project and are available for reading at the Archives.