

Piscotty narrowly wins batting crown

By: Rob Duca - CCBL Senior Writer

SOUTH YARMOUTH, Mass. - Steve Piscotty (Stanford) didn't learn he had joined the likes of Lance Berkman, Jason Varitek, Paul O'Neill and Thurman Munson in the pantheon of the Cape Cod Baseball League's batting champions until nearly one hour after the final regular-season game. The Yarmouth-Dennis jack of all trades (infielder, outfielder and pitcher during the course of the summer) was at a local fast-foot restaurant when the world of Twitter informed him that his final hit on his final at-bat had earned him the coveted Thurman Munson Award by the slimmest of margins.

The difference between Piscotty and Chatham's Dane Phillips (Oklahoma State)? A microscopic .0002 points. Both finished with .349 averages, but the drawn-out math gave the title to Piscotty.

"It surprised me, to be honest. I didn't even know I was in contention," he said. "Obviously, it's a great honor."

Like Ted Williams hitting .406 by going 6-for-8 in a doubleheader on the final day of the 1941 Major League Baseball season, Piscotty can never be accused of backing into the batting crown. He went 4-for-5 on the final day, including a home run and double, knocking in three runs in an 8-7 loss to the Harwich Mariners. He also pitched two-thirds of an inning, and played first base and left field.

"You're talking about a team guy," Y-D field manager Scott Pickler said. "His maturity level is beyond his sophomore year at Stanford."

His big finish raised his batting average 22 points, while the final at-bat allowed him to reach the minimum number of plate appearances to qualify for the title. Heading into the final day, the race was thought to be between Phillips and Orleans' Matt Duffy (Long Beach State). Phillips was at .355, Duffy at .354. But out of nowhere came Piscotty.

"Not knowing might have helped," he admitted. "Otherwise, you might over think it or try too hard to get a hit. I was just trying to hit the ball hard. It turned out to be a good result."

It wasn't merely the closing day that won the batting crown for Piscotty. He went 7-for-13 in his final four games, raising his average 29 points. "Sometimes you just start seeing the ball great for an extended period of time," he said. "Luckily, it happened at the end of the season."

Piscotty's average dipped below .300 only twice all season, falling to .292 in mid-July when he went 10 at-bats without a hit. But he quickly snapped out of the mini-slump. "He was consistent all summer," Pickler said. "He has a pretty simple swing. He didn't have a slump the entire summer. He stays within himself, doesn't try to do too much. He studies pitchers and has a good feel for what he wants to do at the plate."

Consistency has been a hallmark of Piscotty's at Stanford and in summer ball. He earned All Pac-10 honors last spring, hitting .364 with three home runs and 40 RBIs. Playing in the Alaskan Summer League last year, he won the Silver Slugger Award after averaging .289 with 24 RBIs, 18 runs scored and 14 stolen bases in 37 games. He was rated the league's No. 3 pro prospect by Baseball America.

He said playing with wood bats in Alaska and also in a high school summer league made his transition to the Cape League easier.

"But the pitching is a lot better here," he added. "You're seeing a stud every night, not just once a week."

Drafted as a shortstop by the Los Angeles Dodgers in the 45th round out of Amador Valley High School in Pleasanton, Calif., Piscotty sees his future as a position player, although an eventual switch to pitching isn't far-fetched. His fastball topped out at 93 mph this summer in five relief appearances, recording a 1.69 ERA, with five strikeouts and four walks in 5.1 innings.

"I enjoy pitching and I always welcome the opportunity, but I'm definitely a hitter first," he said.

And a somewhat shocking Cape League batting champion.