

Pries a Bulldog on the Mound

By Ryan Reiswig

There's a defining moment in every great athlete's career when they perform on level that made them realize they have something special, something that their peers long to experience.

For Stanford junior right-hander Jordan Pries, that moment came in his freshman year, 2009.

Pries and the Cardinal were facing off against the No. 2 Sun Devils of Arizona State. This game was especially big for Pries not only because of the high-powered offense he was facing, but because of the opposing pitcher as well. Starting that game for Arizona State was Mike Leake, who since that day was drafted by the Cincinnati Reds and became the first player in 10 years to go from college directly to the major leagues.

"We had a 2-0 lead, I struck out ten guys that game, gave up two hits in front of like 5,000 people," says Pries, an Alameda, Calif., native. "It was one of the biggest experiences of my life. I remember having guys at second and third at some point and I got a big strikeout, got a guy to pop-up. I remember thinking, 'This is awesome.'"

The modest and usually calm Pries got so caught up in the moment, he did something out of character.

"In college, that was the most emotion I've shown on the mound," says Pries. "I usually don't fist pump just because I try and stay fairly collected but I remember I gave a few (fist pumps) that game."

Even though the Cardinal ended up losing that game, Pries proved to himself and the rest of the nation that he can pitch against the best.

Pries doesn't shut down offenses by blowing them away with Stephen Strasburg-like 103 mph fastballs. His fastball tops out around a respectful 92 mph, but he likes to keep hitters off balance by changing speeds and by keeping them guessing.

"I try not to maintain a certain pattern," says Pries, who pitched a no-hitter in summer ball last year. "Usually I have the element of switching it up. If I throw a lot of fastballs early, maybe come back with the breaking ball. Or maybe if they're looking for that later in the game I'll come back with the fastball."

Pries comes from a baseball family. His grandfather played 10 years in the major leagues, and his great-uncle is credited with starting the Major League Scouting Bureau. But Pries says he developed his style from two people with no relation to him.

"A couple guys who I admire are Greg Maddux and Tim Hudson just because they're shorter right-handers," says Pries. "They aren't going to overpower anyone. It's more of an art at what they do. I admire that."

Because he isn't going to blow away hitters with a fastball, Pries plays the mental game with hitters, and that requires focus and the ability to stay calm and collected. Calm and collected doesn't mean he leaves his intensity in the Cardinal dugout, however.

"I'm definitely competitive," says Pries. "I've heard people describe me as a bulldog. I like to be intense because I can't go out there and be totally relaxed and blow fastballs by guys. I have to maintain a solid focus throughout my outing or I lose that edge. I take pride in being a competitor and bulldog through the innings."

Pries takes the same competitive approach off the mound as well, taking pride in being a leader in the dugout on days he's not pitching. This may include taking precise notes on pitching charts and talking to other pitchers in the dugout about what's going on in the game.

"I talk a lot in the dugout, yell out to the pitcher and get the guy to stay in the game," says Pries. "At certain points in the game, two-strike counts when you don't have any balls on the guy, then give up a hit, I preach to the other guys about you can't let that happen. You have to bounce a pitch or make a successful waste pitch. Little stuff like that I'll point out."

All these are big reasons why heralded Stanford baseball coach Mark Marquess wanted Pries in the cardinal and white. Marquess is very lucky, however. He came close to having to face Pries several times a year rather than write his name in his own lineup.

"I wouldn't say the proximity to my house was huge deal because I was also looking at other schools on the West Coast," says Pries, who also considered UCLA and Cal. "I just was looking for a school that was good for me academically and going to compete on the diamond as well. It came down to a couple schools, Stanford was one of them, and it's been a good choice for me."

Pries looks to continue to work on his game and hopefully earn a shot at playing professional baseball. While he's well on his way to accomplishing that, he's relishing every moment of the college experience.

"The experience has been awesome," says Pries. "As a pitcher I've grown a ton since high school, understanding certain ways to go about facing hitters and higher caliber players. I've made great friends and that's all I'm hoping to do. I already have lifelong friends that I've made and that's something that'll never be taken away from me."