

Sandbrink bringing back the Funk

By Joseph Beyda, Stanford Daily
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Danny Sandbrink's schedule isn't that of the typical college student, or any kind of student for that matter. He's awake at 7:00 in the morning, asleep by 10:30 at night, doesn't take classes anymore and spends time perfecting his Funk.

Senior righthander Danny Sandbrink has seen a return to the stellar form that had scouts raving over him as a freshman. Sandbrink's signature pitch, which he calls the "Funk," has been very effective this season and has helped him to a team-low 2.27 ERA.

That's his signature, after all, and it's been working well as of late.

After beginning his senior season for the No. 28 Stanford baseball team as a reliever, Sandbrink has fought his way back into the starting rotation behind an uncharacteristic pitch that is stumping opposing batters.

"The Funk is kind of like a two-seam fastball," he explained. "I just put a lot of pressure on my index finger. When you throw it, it looks like a fastball and then it dips at the end, with the same velocity as my fastball," he said. "This year what's really made the difference is that I've been able to control it a lot more, and throw it for strikes a lot more."

The righthander developed the pitch during his senior season in high school. And when he arrived on the Farm, former Stanford pitching coach Jeff Austin came up with the name because of the pitch's sudden movement.

"It's very effective because it seems to be his regular fastball, and it's not recognizable," said senior catcher Zach Jones. "But [behind the plate,] it isn't unpredictable. Once you get used to it, it's not hard to catch."

Sandbrink fooled quite a few opponents with the pitch his freshman year, posting the second-best ERA for the Cardinal and helping keep Stanford's season alive with a pair of crucial postseason starts in elimination games. But two consecutive up-and-down seasons left Sandbrink on the outside looking in when it came time for head coach Mark Marquess to set the 2011 starting rotation.

As a senior, he didn't start until March 29—over a month into the season—when he earned his first win of the year with a three-inning, hitless effort over Saint Mary's.

"He was never really complaining, even when he wasn't playing as much and wasn't in a prominent role at the beginning of the year," said senior outfielder Dave Giuliani. "But he just always came up there, gave it his all and actually put up really great numbers."

Just three starts later, Sandbrink is 3-0, reaching the three-win mark for the first time in his Stanford career despite having made half as many appearances as in any other season. His last victory came in commanding fashion over No. 7 Arizona State, setting a career high with nine strikeouts in his first complete game since freshman year.

"He went up there last weekend and really dominated," Giuliani said. "He showed the rest of the team a lot of courage in sticking it out, and he ended up throwing 128 pitches.

"He was struggling at that point, but he went out there and gave it his all, and got us a complete-game win, which was huge for us," Giuliani added.

Teammates see Sandbrink as a leader by example, always showing up to compete and work hard. Yet in the latter regard, his off-the-field life has taken an unconventional turn this quarter. When Sandbrink graduated early with a degree in economics, he stopped taking classes but began new intellectual pursuits—this time, in the corporate world.

Through a parent of a former teammate, Sandbrink began an internship performing data analysis for Cisco Systems, Inc., opting not to take his final quarter off.

It's a half-hour commute—hence the stringent sleeping tendencies—and Sandbrink's shortened workday allows him to get back to campus for afternoon practices and games.

"It's kind of tough sometimes, when everyone else wants to stay up late and I have to get up earlier," Sandbrink said. "But I think it's going to be good for me and give structure to my everyday life.

"Every day when I come home from work, I'm way more excited to be with my teammates and playing baseball," he added.

Playing at the next level is Sandbrink's eventual aspiration, but regardless of his future baseball career, he sees the internship as a necessity—not a backup plan.

"The main thing is to help me build my resume for after pro baseball," Sandbrink said. "Afterwards I'm going to try to find a job. When

you're an athlete in college, you don't really have much time to build your resume, especially when you play baseball all year and play summer ball."

He blew away the competition last summer by going 7-0 in the St. Louis Metro Collegiate Baseball League with a league-best 1.26 ERA, and he has carried over some of that statistical success to his senior season—Sandbrink's stellar .201 opposing batting average and 2.27 ERA lead the Cardinal through 38 games this year.

But before being evaluated for Major League Baseball's upcoming draft in early June, Sandbrink has another type of national prestige in mind.

"I came into the season trying to put the team over myself, trying to focus on making sure everyone is doing their best," he said. "Making it to [the College World Series in] Omaha is the ultimate goal, rather than focusing on myself and my playing time."

There should be no shortage of playing time for Sandbrink this week, with Stanford playing five games in as many days beginning tonight. Sandbrink is slated to pitch for the Cardinal on Saturday against Washington, in a 2 p.m. matchup at Sunken Diamond.