



# inOth Word

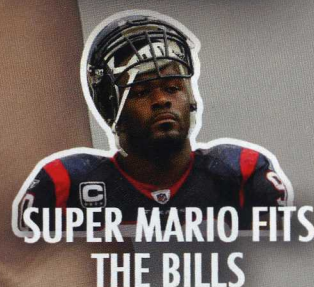
APRIL 2012

## THE RUNDOWN



LUCK NFL  
ERA TAKES  
CENTER STAGE

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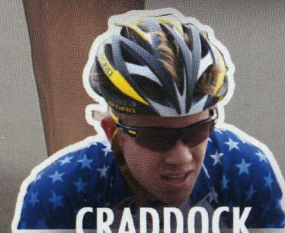
SUPER MARIO FITS  
THE BILLS

p17



RYAN SWEET ON  
HOUSTON CLAY

p17



CRADDOCK  
CRUISING  
LANCE LANE

p21

**READY,  
SET?  
VAN GOGH!**

■ Texas sprint champ Jaylon Hicks draws style points for crossing a line



# PROFILE

**School:** Arizona State

**Sport:** College baseball

**Year:** Junior

**Position:** RHP

**High School:** Rosenberg Lamar Consolidated

**Then:** 2003 Little League World Series pitcher

**Now:** Breakout unbeaten Pac-12 hurler raising national profile

>>>BRADY RODGERS

By: Jo'el Steven Rousse

## FRIDAY NIGHT FLIGHT

*It all began with a high school Christmas gift trip to a baseball camp and keen appreciation for the alma mater of Barry Bonds and Dustin Pedroia. Now former All-District pitcher and Lamar Consolidated stud Brady Rodgers is mastering Packard Stadium's latest rendition of "The Greatest Show on Dirt." Pac-12 powerhouse Arizona State continues to pack heat in its quest for another conference crown. The Texan rifle's "earned" place in the Sun Devils full-on attack.*

Brady Rodgers considers himself something of a "Family Guy" TV show fanatic. It's often satirical, absurdist humor is the one constant, all things being equal, he can count on to stay loose and spread light-heartedness among teammates in sometimes tense moments.

The Arizona State pitching ace doesn't have a favorite to speak of. So we'll recount our own.

It's the guilty pleasure "April in Quahog" spot where Peter happens upon son Stewie at play with a curious array of 1980s pop culture cartoon characters.

"So, you having a tea party?" Peter asks.

"No," the toddler shoots back wryly. "We're working out a land deal. Trap Jaw ("He-Man & the Masters of the Universe") is trying to get a variance to build an unper-

mitted structure within 10 feet of Optimus Prime's ("Transformers") property line. Destro's ("G.I. Joe") the city councilman who's telling Trap Jaw that he has to file it as an accessory structure. And even then it can only be built at the rear of the lot."

Finally, adding the ironic poke of humor at age-appropriate kiddie logic, Stewie nods to the last toy perched up at his table and concedes:



### LITTLE KNOWN FACTS

#### Must-see Campus attraction for first-timers:

"The whole campus is a great tourist attraction! For me personally I'd recommend Camelback Mountain. If you're into outdoors and climbing. It's fun, it's tough and it's a good workout. I've run it uphill."

#### Favorite Family Guy moment:

"It's tough to pick a favorite (episode) but that's definitely my kind of humor. It's a show that can always get the guys (teammates) laughing and talking."

#### Houston Astros 2012 season prediction:

"The Astros are my team! Of course, I always keep up with my Astros. Unfortunately, they've fallen into a bad slump. I'm not sure how well they'll do this season. But that's my hometown team and I ride with them all the way. I still get (ESPN) SportsCenter updates on my (cell) phone."

#### Something I've fallen in love with about Arizona:

"The girls! The women of Arizona are pretty hot, LOL!"

#### Last time I beamed a batter on accident:

"Actually, I've never hit a batter on purpose. That's something I'm proud of. The thought has never even crossed my mind and for me it's never come to that."

#### Where I've like to spend a spring break vacation:

"Well, of course, in my position with what's going on I haven't taken spring break (vacation) in about 15 years because of baseball and the timing. If I had the time free I wouldn't mind going someplace nice in California. Or somewhere on a beach where I could let loose."

#### Best part of being an Arizona State Sun Devil:

"They really do care about you. They want the best for you. They care about you on the field and in the classroom. You look at academics. The regular college student doesn't have someone pushing them to stay up there. Being here (ASU baseball) is definitely something that pushed me all those years to work hard to get here."



"And the Care Bear is just a Care Bear."

Of course, the inside joke of it all is that this was part of an over-the-top April Fools' Day play. But for Rodgers, the unflappable junior right-hander (5-1, 1.12 ERA) exceling atop the Sun Devils' pitching staff, the joke has been on nearly every side to step to the plate.

It hasn't quite been all fun and games for the 21-year-old Richmond, Tex, native, preparing to go as another season of take-no-prisoners Pac-12 Conference play hits stride. But Rodgers has looked sharp early for No. 23-ranked ASU, bolstering his regard as one of the league's best and his stake as third-year Coach Tim Esmay's Friday night starter - the spot revered as a pitching staff's No. 1.

"It's definitely been a huge honor," Rodgers said of holding down the position that's earned him the nickname "Mr. Friday Night." Especially in the Pac-12, it's a position that gets you a lot of respect. It usually goes to a person with at least a couple seasons of experience or someone who's done something pretty incredible.

"Last year I started to take on more of a leadership role, I think. As a junior now there are more eyes on me so I've just tried to be strong and play almost with a chip on my shoulder."

A litany of accolades and stoic performances have primed the once precocious Sun Devils pitcher for his headlining, otherwise go-to-guy status this season.

The 6-2 Rodgers Greater Houston remembers for his four-pitch mix, for striking out 376 batters in his high school career, for winning 16 in a no-no as a Lamar Consolidated senior and for garnering Fort Bend Herald Pitcher of the Year honors three times has continued to make waves in college.

He had a sensational freshman debut, appearing in 22 games with five starts and leading the conference with an ASU frosh record-low 2.11 ERA. A Freshman All-America first-teamer, he ended the 2010 campaign (4-3) with three saves and a National Player of the Week nod that May for his eight-inning shutout heroics in an intrastate rivalry victory over Arizona.

Eschewing fears of a sophomore slump Rodgers picked up right where he left off in 2011. First embracing the role of Friday night starter, he'd throw 98.1 innings, striking out 87 while going (9-4, 2.75) in 15 starts in his second stanza against the league's best.

All told, opponents hit .237 against him as he yielded a conference-low one homer per season. He recorded the first complete-game shutout of his college career against Washington and made conference Honor-



## "Every year the goal is to be national champions."

- Brady Rodgers

able Mention. He'd go on to build his resume last summer and grab two wins for the USA Baseball collegiate national team (2-0, 2.08, three starts), garnering buzz for his ASU return for 2011-12.

"That complete game shutout against Washington is probably my best moment," said Rodgers, credited for having arguably the best control of any pitcher in the college game this year.

A fringe Top 10 ball club this spring, Esmay has come to rely on Rodgers' 90-mph fastball, quality slider and sharp downer curve throughout the first part of a season that's already featured clashes against mighty mighties Texas Tech, defending Pac-12 champ UCLA, Cal-State Fullerton and Oregon State.

His one-run complete-game win over California March 23 was recognized with his third career conference Player of Week.

Rodgers shined even in defeat against Oregon March 31, taking his first loss despite giving up only one earned run in a complete-game performance. He allowed only four base runners on three singles, a homer and no walks in his third trip to the mound this spring that went the distance. As of early April, he's struck out 48 and his earned run average is the lowest in the Pac-12. His count of 64.0 innings pitched is also conference-leading making his ERA all the more impressive.

"That guy is lights-out," junior shortstop Deven Marrero told the Arizona Republic after Rodgers went eight deep again without giving up an earned run in an 8-2 win over the Beavers, April 5. "Every Friday night that guy gives us his best. He's the best pitcher in the country, hands down."

"We've prepared him for this," Esmay says. "With Brady we're expecting that every Friday he can kind've carry us a bit and eat up a lot of innings."

The Sun Devils are ineligible for post-season play this year. So Rodgers & Co. intend to mark their 2012 by their final result in conference. They're in fifth-place with more than six weeks to play before a three-game regular season-closer at first-place Arizona.

"Every year the goal is to be national champions," he said. "It's a mindset. Of course, we made it to (NCAA) Super Regionals my freshman year and won conference. Last year we fell short (of a conference title) so that's kind of inspired us to hang tough with the mindset we can win conference this year. The last couple of years (the) conference (championship) has been won on the last day."

"Game-by-game we just have to stay ready to fight with every conference team we play." •

