

## **Curl Takes on Pandemic as Driving Force in Pursuit of Pro-Baseball Career**

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MERCER ISLAND, Wash. – It is a crisp and chilly November morning at Pioneer Park in La Grande, Oregon. Trevor Curl, a sophomore-baseball player at Eastern Oregon University, is preparing to play live baseball for the first time in over six months. He is a member of the small percentage of athletes currently playing competitive sports during the COVID-19 pandemic. This opportunity, which he has worked so hard for, is crucial to his life-long goal of playing professional baseball.

It took Curl a long time to get to this point. He grew up in Newcastle, Washington and his love for the sport was apparent at a young age. The young boy's passion was sparked by Seattle's international phenom, Ichiro Suzuki, who Curl idolized as he grew up. Unlike most kids his age who played video games, Curl played wiffle ball by himself every day as he envisioned himself in a big-league uniform.

As Curl grew older, his dreams became larger. At the age of eight, he was already playing Select Baseball putting him far ahead of most of his peers. The man who made the largest impact on his young-baseball career was his coach, Ron Hay.

“Ron taught me about the four D's to success: desire, dedication, determination and devotion,” said Curl. “You have to use all four to succeed in life, and I still use them to this day.”

Curl played for Hay until he was 15 years old and not only learned how to become better on the diamond, but also how to respect others and live life with integrity.

Going into his freshman year at Liberty High School, Curl had high hopes to play college baseball at a big school like Vanderbilt University. When he entered his sophomore year, though, his expectations had changed.

“When you're a sophomore in high school, you kind of have an idea if you fit there,” said Curl. “For me, not being the fastest or strongest guy, it felt like I was not going to be an SEC player, or even a PAC-12 player.”

He deemed junior college as a more realistic path.

By his junior year, Curl was the starting second baseman for Liberty High School. This was his first full season at the varsity level, and he struggled at the plate. He could only muster ten hits in 18 games resulting in a .204 batting average.

“A big disadvantage for me was that my coach did not force me into the weight room. I wish our coach did, I really do,” said Curl. His small frame, 5'9" and 170 pounds, made his recruitment difficult.

“The hardest part is actually showing them what you can do. It was hard for me to find opportunities to play in front of scouts, so I mainly had to rely on videos. Unfortunately, every high-school athlete was sending tapes, so it was hard to stand out,” said Curl.

In January of 2018, Curl’s future in athletics accelerated when he committed to play baseball at Yuba Community College. This gave him an opportunity to extend his career and experience a different style of baseball. He explained that the minor-league-like nature of junior-college baseball taught him lessons that he would never have learned at a division one school.

“It [Junior college] will be very honest with you. It tells you if you are ready or not to play college baseball,” Curl explained. “It’s not always about success. It’s also about if you’re willing to give it your all and ultimately, the guys who are at the next level after JUCO are the ones who took all those disadvantages and turned them into advantages. Give me a crappy field and I’ll find a way to field the ground ball. Give me a bar and a couple of small dumbbells, I’m going to be finding a way to get stronger,” he said.

Curl’s positive mindset helped him earn the starting position at first base for Yuba during his sophomore year. This was an important season as he was looking to transfer to a better school. He got off to a tremendous start as he hit .325 and drove in 12 runs through his first 20 games. This hot stretch caught the eye of Eastern Oregon University to where Curl would eventually commit.

“Coach Mac [McInerney] was really good during the recruitment process. He sold the school well, and he was completely honest about the program’s current situation as they were reviving it from the dead,” said Curl.

In many ways, this reflects his entire baseball life up to this point. Just as Curl was looking for a chance to play baseball, McInerney was looking for players to take a chance on the program to help bring it back to life. This made the two a perfect match.

Unfortunately, Curl’s rapid start was put to a halt as the COVID-19 pandemic swept the country and stopped collegiate sports across the nation. Curl would not play organized baseball for six months, his longest stretch since he was six years old.

“I’ve already been through the struggles before so it’s not like something was new. But the harder part was actually dealing with it,” Curl explained. “There were definitely times where I wondered if it was over for me.”

To stay ready for his return to the diamond, Curl worked out in his basement and went to his high-school field daily to get reps in. Because of sequestration, he was limited to hitting off a tee and playing long toss by throwing a ball into a fence.

In August of 2020, Curl learned that Eastern Oregon University was going to allow athletes to live on campus, meaning the team could practice and scrimmage. Because several collegiate athletes were still stuck at home, this was a rare opportunity.

“We were so lucky just to be there this fall because there's definitely other programs who weren't out there. When I was told that not a lot of guys were out playing, I knew I could not waste this opportunity to get better,” Curl said.

While Curl's path may be the one less traveled, the lessons he learned built character that many college athletes may never be able to harness. He still hopes to play professional baseball someday, and there is no doubt he will give it his all. While he has not conquered the traditional five baseball tools yet, he has mastered four others that have kept his baseball life alive: desire, dedication, determination, and devotion.