

# Sheehan Has Made A Huge Impact In Pitchers' Lives

By **PETE WILKINSON**  
Special To Collegiate Baseball

CHICAGO — One of the great teachers in the game of baseball is Mark Sheehan.

The 2014 Tom House Teaching Professional of The Year's first coaching assignment came while he was still in high school.

He helped to revive his small town's struggling Little League program.

At the time, he didn't know just how valuable an experience it would turn out to be.

He was a solid high school pitcher preparing to become a solid collegiate pitcher.

Like many outstanding high school hurlers, he was over-pitched and underdeveloped.

The consequences showed up in college, where he suffered a rotator cuff injury which effectively ended his college playing career.

Mark kicked around, he says, trying to hang onto the game he loved.

He played semi-pro ball for a dozen years and then as he and his wife started their family, he drifted away from the game.

After nearly a decade away from baseball, in 2005 Sheehan's young nephew made a 8-year-old travel baseball team.

Mark was pressed into service as the volunteer pitching coach for the team.

Having gotten hurt himself as a pitcher, Mark made the decision to figure out how to do this right.

He went to work studying the recognized coaches and instructors of the time, trying to weed his way through their information to find something he could make sense of, fiddle around with and grow to believe in.

Using pieces from many sources, Mark began the process of developing his own idea of how to pitch and — just as importantly — how to teach pitching to young



**Pete Wilkinson (left) and Mark Sheehan, winner of the 2014 Tom House Teaching Professional of The Year.**

players.

Having spent almost a full year piecing his own picture together from everything he could get his hands on and read or look at, Mark found that he had a real passion for both pitching and the kids he was trying to teach.

Spending nearly all of his spare time wrestling with methods, concepts and language, Mark finally traveled to San Diego to meet with Tom House.

They talked, and he attended a National Pitching Association clinic.

Something clicked for Mark during that time.

He says, "I found things that helped fit my pieces together into something more unified."

He went back home to Chicago and continued to look for answers.

"My approach to the work got stronger, and the kids got better

faster. We were starting to build blocks that worked and integrated themselves into a better whole."

His young pitchers were getting better.

Encouraged by his own search and by his pitching staff's results and a restored passion for the game, Mark took a second trip to San Diego to see House again and came away thinking, "Tom might have a bigger impact than, perhaps, anyone in the history of the game."

He says now, "I was fortunate to run across his stuff and get to know him."

"He put all the reading, looking at videos and the work I had done into perspective for me."

"When I took it back to the kids I was working with, the results on both the health and pitcher's performance sides soared. They just took off."

He began teaching more kids.

"I started teaching 12, then pretty quickly it was 35, then 50 kids, and it took off. Before you know it, I was opening up an indoor academy."

"More kids gravitated to the academy, including many young pitchers in the region who had been working at the Chicago White Sox sponsored academy nearby."

So, in 2009, the White Sox called Mark.

"The White Sox had three academies operating in the region, and they were opening a fourth nearby in Glen Ellyn," Mark said.

"They asked me to join their organization as the Director of the Glen Ellyn Academy."

He said yes, and it grew quickly.

"Our first year was a smashing success, and the growth the second year nearly doubled."

"It was gratifying that families were approving and embracing the work I was doing."

"Better yet, our kids were getting great results, and most importantly they were staying healthy."

After a few years passed, Mark felt the need to go back out on his own as an independent academy owner.

He said, "What the heck am I doing?"

"I have a family to feed. I need to find out if I can make a business like this one successful, or if I should do something else. I set goals."

"Work with the best athletes, become the best instructor I could be, get and share the best information, and integrate my approach to teaching into a program with legs."

The business took off. Mark's overriding themes were to role model getting better at what he did so his students could see the process of getting better at what they were doing and, "first and foremost, to protect kids from throwing related injuries."

He invited parents to be part of his sessions with his students, wanting them to be part of the experience.

He says that the retention rate over all the time he has operated the academy was upwards of 90 percent, and that the family's participation made a big difference in reinforcing the values that accrue from seriously undertaking the challenges that pitching presents.

He wanted to join with others who shared his passion for pitching and his motivation for pitcher health.

So he looked for people who took the time to care to continue to get better at the information part and better at the teaching part.

Saying that his instinct is to "keep young pitchers healthy, from eight-year-olds to twenty-eight-year-olds."

Today, Mark continues to run the Sheehan Pitching Academy he founded in 2005 and is the Director of the National Pitching Association's Chicago Region.

He is a 12-time certified member of the National Pitching Association and a 10-year member of its faculty.

He works with pitchers of all ages in the region, nationally and internationally from Little League all the way up to the professional ranks.

Over 40 of his students are currently pitching in collegiate baseball.

He says he wants to leave a legacy, but that the legacy will be to build his brand and to further enhance the NPA brand by working collaboratively to help develop the next generation of young pitching coaches and teachers.

"But mostly," he says, "I want to join with people who have a like-minded belief in what we can accomplish together to improve the game and collaboratively build a brand of unmatched significance."

## Trip To Columbia Was Amazing Odyssey To Help Those In Need

By **TIM FANNING**  
Head Baseball Coach  
Glenwood School (AL)

PUENTE IGLESIAS, Columbia — During the past summer, a team represented by several local high schools, college and leaders from Smiths Station, Ala. embarked on a trip to the interior of Columbia.

Contrary to popular belief, baseball is not given much thought there on a daily basis.

When talking to people back in the States about the upcoming trip, they assumed all Latin American countries love baseball. But the truth is soccer is still king!

Our team featured 26 people, ranging from ages 16-52.

One of our goals for this trip was to introduce baseball to children in Puente Iglesias, a small village at the base of the Andes Mountains.

We would also give them baseball equipment, uniforms, bibles and hopefully some sort of structure to continue training after our departure.

We spent five days in the country at a beautiful farm house, locally known as a Finca, so graciously provided by Patrick Powers.

Patrick is an American businessman, originally from Chicago, that spends a good deal of time in Colombia with his Colombian wife and four dual citizen children.

He felt our organization could not only help the kids of this region learn about baseball but open doors for them that could change the

course of their lives forever and for generations to come.

Six months prior to the trip, he helped obtain Visas for two young men, Jose Mercado and Mateo Porras in hopes of them returning with us to pursue their dreams of getting an American education and playing baseball in college.

After just a few days with these two wonderful young men, several people had offered to open their homes to Jose and Mateo upon our return to the states.

Before we started our clinics, we took a horseback ride through the mountains and climbed a volcano, Cerro Bravo (10,800 ft.).

It was amazing to watch our travel party interact with each other while pushing themselves physically and mentally.

You can learn so much about people when they are put in extreme circumstances.

Are you going to give up in life when it gets hard or are you going to push through it and become a better person for having persevered during the tough times?

That's really what it's all about, and they all passed with flying colors. Believe me when I tell you, that hike was no joke!

The second half of our trip would take place around the city of Medellin.

With almost three million people, different challenges would lay ahead with the biggest being transportation.

Despite this, we arranged to do



**Members of the travel party introduce baseball to children in Puente Iglesias, Columbia.**

clinics and equipment donations in Envigado and Santa Margarita.

We also met with the Mayor's sports organization, Inder, in hopes of promoting baseball in the city.

In the end, it was about the kids we spent time with and how they blessed us every day.

One day at a clinic in Envigado, several of the moms went home and made empanadas for everyone just to show their appreciation.

In Santa Margarita, one of the kids went to his house during the clinic to get us water to show his appreciation.

It's hard to explain the feeling you have inside when something like that happens because of the circumstances these kids live with (no running water, etc.).

After doing clinics during the day, it had been arranged for us to play the Medellin Select Team in a three game series at El Estadio Luis Alberto Villegas in Medellin.

We didn't put the roster for this trip together to play real games, but we made the most of it, and the kids had a blast.

We made flyers and had the boys pass them out during the day to

promote the event.

When the lights came on, the little kids showed up!

Our kids were signing autographs before the games just like they were in the Big Leagues.

They never stopped smiling from start to finish.

One of the local kids passed his phone to the dugout and the message read, "You are our idols!"

That had a big impact on the boys. There is no way any of our kids will ever take for granted something as simple as playing a baseball game again after this trip.