

By Erik Bremer

Carson Teel is used to playing for winning ballclubs. In high school, he led his Stillwater, Oklahoma team to their first state championship since 1957. At Oklahoma State, he helped the Cowboys win the Big 12 Tournament and reach the College World Series. When he arrived on the Potomac Nationals roster in mid-April, he was faced with the rare prospect of wearing the uniform of a last-place club.

Teel had been outstanding at Class-A Hagerstown in his second professional season, tearing up the South Atlantic League with 10 strikeouts and only one run allowed in his first 6.0 innings out of the bullpen. But within a week of joining the P-Nats, he watched as a rough stretch dropped his club into the cellar of the Carolina League Northern Division.

That's not to say that Teel was responsible for Potomac's dismal April. The lefty did his part, allowing two runs on six hits in 11.0 innings as a relief arm. But for someone accustomed to playing a major role in his team's success, a greater opportunity was elusive.

It's been like this before for Teel, who starred as a two-way player in high school with a .471 batting average, 31 stolen bases

and a 1.44 ERA in 12 starts. He was the catalyst for Stillwater's state championship run in 2014, pitching an eight-inning complete game in the semifinals and notching three of his team's four hits. But despite the standout stats, Teel didn't receive much collegiate attention and joined the nearby Oklahoma State program as a walk-on. Playing under the tutelage of fellow Stillwater grad Josh Holliday, Teel redshirted in 2015 and played sparingly in 2016.

"I thought about being done with baseball my freshman year of college," says Teel. "I talked to my coaches, and they said I should give summer ball a shot. I threw 60 innings, and felt like I was back."

In two summers in the

Coastal Plain League and New England Collegiate Baseball League, Teel recaptured the magic he had back in high school. He parlayed that into increased opportunity at Oklahoma State, which in turn raised his profile at the national level.

"I'm never going to give up on something I know I'm able to do," says Teel. "I was blessed with talents, and now I have to make the most of those talents."

As a relief pitcher in 2017, Teel was twice named Big 12 Pitcher of the Week and played a key role in advancing OSU through their conference tournament into the NCAA Tournament. Pitching in all four tournament games, the lefty allowed only one run in 8.1 relief innings while being named to the All-Tournament Team.

Teel had an opportunity to go pro after just two collegiate seasons when he was drafted by the Boston Red Sox in the 27th round. He opted to return to school, and after another strong season as a junior was selected by the Nationals in the 16th round.

He was sent to the Gulf Coast League after the draft, and spent 2018 between the GCL Nationals and the Auburn Doubledays of the New York-Penn League. More solid numbers followed, with a 2.39 ERA in 37.2 innings between the rotation and bullpen.

College relievers can be fast-tracked once they reach professional

baseball, and Teel was no exception. With good numbers, a southpaw delivery and a winning pedigree, he spent only two weeks with the Hagerstown Suns before joining the P-Nats earlier this year. And with the starting staff scuffling, Teel got his chance to stretch out in a more regimented role beginning in mid-May. He flourished, and so did his teammates, cutting the pitching staff ERA nearly in half from April to May.

"I'm just trying to be a difference maker, you know?" says Teel. "You want to be a person that can be relied on. There's no pressure behind that, it just means people want you to do well."

In Teel's first two starts, he allowed one run on one hit in 8.1 innings while striking out 11 batters. Limited only by pitch count, he has worked his way back to a typical starter's length and played a big role in Potomac's resurgence. They've climbed out of last place, and entered the All-Star Break in June with a winning month.

"Winning's contagious," says Teel. "Being on a team in high school where we won ... even in basketball, we won all the time! I don't think I've ever been on a team that was below .500 until now. But at the same time, we're playing well. Things are starting to look up for us and we're playing better. If you win early, you're going to have that drive to keep winning. There's a lot of things you have to do in order to win, and this team is making those sacrifices."

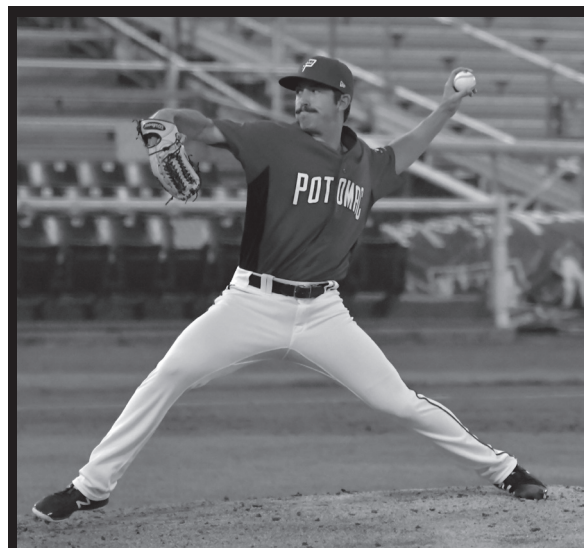


PHOTO BY GARY DIZE

LHP Carson Teel has played a big part in Potomac's resurgence, as he's switched to a starting role. In his first two starts, he allowed one run on one hit in 8.1 innings while striking out 11 batters.