

Washington Sunday: Wild Things' Sidick: Those who do, teach

Chris Sidick is in no rush to leave the Washington Wild Things.

"This is fun for me," said the outfielder, who is in his fourth season with the Frontier League team. "I'm having a good time every day. This is what I like to do."

But at the same time, he is preparing for life once his playing career ends.

Sidick, a 2001 Canon-McMillan High School graduate, owns and operates C-Side Sports Academy, a baseball training facility located in Canonsburg. In September, Sidick will move his business from its current location near the Canonsburg Hospital to a much-larger, 13,000-square foot building located about a mile away.

Sidick, 25, began the business about two years ago as a means to make money in the offseason. He started by giving hitting lessons out of his garage at his home in Cecil Township.

"I would be looking for a job each winter," said Sidick, who earned a business management degree and minored in sports management at Marietta College, "but no one would hire me because they knew, in four months, I would be gone. I knew I could give hitting lessons."

Sidick started with five students. He now has 67. He moved his academy to its current location this past February. Along with private hitting lessons, he now provides hitting camps and leagues, speed and agility training, pitching lessons and softball lessons.

His new location will give him enough space to create a 13-and-under league, where teams will play twice a week.

"I've found something I want to do with the rest of my life," he said.

And he has a slew of trainers helping him out, including Wild Things pitcher Aaron Ledbetter; Chillicothe Paints manager Mark Mason; Mike DeMark, who pitches at the Class A level in the San Diego Padres organization and former Wild Things player Patrick Sadler, a Trinity High School grad.

Others include Grant Psomas, who currently plays at Triple-A for the Florida Marlins; former California University player Jordy Russell; former South Park and South Fayette High School coach Dan Berty; and Matt DeSalvo, Sidick's college roommate and a former New York Yankees pitcher who currently plays at Triple-A for the Atlanta Braves.

Sidick said playing for the Wild Things has helped to grow his business.

"Absolutely. All the advertising I've done, I've attached the Wild Things name to it," he said. "It gets my name out there. It builds clientele. It's been really good for me."

And good for the Wild Things as well.

"The fact he's a local kid who's so entrenched in the community, that brings value," Wild Things general manager Ross Vecchio said. "He's a great representative for our organization."

"I want nothing more than Chris to be successful in his academy. It's a great thing for Chris, and a great thing for the Wild Things."

Sidick has been involved with the Wild Things since the team's inception in 2002.

First, as a fan. He attended games the first three seasons to watch his former college teammate, Jay Coakley. He joined the Wild Things as a player in 2005 and hit .333 and .300 and combined to steal 46 bases his first two seasons.

His average dipped to .244 in 2007, but he also walked 75 times and stole 22 bases in helping the Wild Things to within a game of the Frontier League title.

Through Wednesday, he was hitting .280 with four home runs, 11 RBIs and three stolen bases. The Wild Things were 17-16 through Wednesday.

In 2006, Sidick was recognized by Baseball America as one of the top prospects in independent league baseball.

"Chris is a fantastic talent," Vecchio said. "He's one of the most feared hitters and feared players in our league. He brings a dimension of power and speed and can get on base better than anybody in our league. He does a lot for the club."

Sidick said he plans to play through 2010, when he will reach the Frontier League's mandatory retirement age, 28. He has enjoyed playing near his hometown.

"It's definitely nice to play in front of friends and family at every home game," he said.

Sidick would like nothing more than to be on a Frontier League title team before he's done playing.

"Every year, we've been in contention," he said. "I'm trying to get that ring. We've brought in some new position players and pitchers to get us to that goal. All we do is win here. We just need something to seal the deal."

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