



© 2008 MLB Advanced Media, L.P. All rights reserved.

Time in Minors key for Batesole

07/09/2008 9:34 PM ET

By Fred Claire

One of the great baseball stories of this season, or of any season, took place at the collegiate level, as the Fresno State Bulldogs captured the College World Series against all odds.

The so-called experts are still wondering how Fresno State became the lowest-seeded team to win an NCAA title and survive six elimination games in the process.

When you go looking for the answers to this amazing achievement, I would suggest you start with the man who does his best to shun attention that comes his way -- head coach Mike Batesole.

"We have a very simple philosophy when it comes to our baseball program," said Batesole. "It has to do with getting guys who are 'grinders,' getting guys who are willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done and, most important, getting guys who believe totally in the team concept."

A great deal of what Batesole believes in was established 20 years ago, well before he led Fresno State to its first NCAA baseball title. It dates back to the spring of 1988 when Batesole was a Minor League player in the Los Angeles Dodgers' organization.

"I'll never forget that spring because of the impact it had on me, related to how you need to prepare," recalled Batesole. "I was just starting my fourth year in professional baseball and almost every day in the late afternoon when the big league team was working out everybody seemed to have departed, except for a few guys who were in the batting cages."

"When I went over to the cages I found just two players -- Kirk Gibson and Steve Sax -- working with coaches Ben Hines and Tommy Davis. I would just stand there and observe how these people went about their business, until I finally got a chance to help out by picking up some baseballs."

"In my four years in the Dodger organization, this turned out to be my most memorable time because it impressed upon me the importance of hard work and dedication."

It's not as if Batesole didn't know the value of hard work. In fact, if you talk to the people who were in the Dodgers' Minor League system at the time, you will get glowing reports -- "a hard-nosed player, a guy who really grinds it out, a quiet player, but very determined."

"My four years in the Dodgers' system taught me a lot, particularly when it came to hitting because I had the chance to work with some great instructors like Tommy Davis and Tommy Byers," said Batesole. "I simply lacked the talent to get to the Major League level and, if anything, I probably tried too hard."

Batesole had been drafted in the 14th round out of Oral Roberts University and he terms his days as a college player "one of the best times of my life."

Batesole's love for the game as a high school, college and professional player was a natural lead-in to his coaching career. He spent five years at the junior college level before spending seven seasons as the head coach at Cal State Northridge. He joined Fresno State in 2003.

All of the experiences Batesole had in baseball came into full force this season, as his team started the season 8-11, finished with the most losses of any national collegiate champ in history (47-31) and yet ended up on top of the pile when the College World Series was finished.

"There was a lesson that all of us learned during the course of the tournament and the course of this season," said Batesole. "It is the power of trust. It is the power of being a great teammate. It has to do with the trust that everybody will do his job. It is the power that comes from being totally unselfish. It is the power that comes from praising your teammates, but never focusing attention on yourself."

"You could feel that trust in our dugout during every game. It was an amazing feeling. It was very real and very strong."

Batesole said his team had a basic rule when it came to publicity.

"Any time a player used the word 'I' in an interview, he was fined one dollar. We had one case where a player came in with a story in the local paper and put down three dollars on my desk. He said 'Coach, I didn't use the word I but I'll pay anyway.'

"We have a chance to use this season, to do something special with our program," said Batesole. "We need to work very hard over the next 12 months and to do all we can to use the momentum that has been built. We can't afford to get careless or lazy."

Careless and lazy aren't words you will find when you talk to people who know Mike Batesole.

This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

[MLB.com](#)