

## Meet Jordan Pratt, the Cardinal's old man on campus

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After years of toiling in minor league baseball, Jordan Pratt decided to return to college to play football at age 26.

But some schools he queried last year never got back to him. "I'm sure some of them were like, 'Is this guy joking?'" said Pratt, a three-sport star during his high school days in Oregon.

Stanford recruiters had a different response: They wanted to know what he got on his college entrance exam. Pratt scored 32 out of a possible 36 on the American College Testing (ACT) exam -- well above the national average of 21.

Stanford might have a top-10 football team led by Heisman Trophy favorite Andrew Luck, but it remains a different kind of university when it comes to its student population. This is a place in which Luck, the projected top overall pick of the 2011 NFL draft, opted to return to school to earn a degree in architectural design.

It's a school in which Pratt might pass celebrity golfer Michelle Wie on the way to class this fall or perhaps fellow incoming freshman Rachael Flatt, a 2010 Olympic figure skater.

"We don't have a rigid, fixed notion of how an undergraduate degree should be taken," said Julie Lythcott-Haims, associate vice provost and dean of freshmen and undergraduate advising. "Great ideas and experiences are not things that you can plan for. They happen."

Pratt's journey to Stanford as a walk-on wide receiver happened after eight years in the Los Angeles Dodgers farm system. He is following a rare path paved by former 49ers quarterback Chris Weinke, who starred at Florida State after six years in the minors, and former Raiders quarterback Josh Booty, who spent five years in pro baseball before playing football at Louisiana State.

The player some are calling "the Professor" emphasized the indirect route in his admissions essay in an effort to separate himself from other applicants. While Pratt hopes to share his life experiences with other Stanford students, the 6-foot-3, 217-pound receiver wants to become more than a novelty item on the football field. It's too early to tell if he'll ever get into a game, but he plans to play all four years, meaning Pratt could be a 29-year-old senior in 2014.

"Whatever that takes, however long it takes, I'll do whatever I need to do," said the receiver who caught 76 passes for 1,124 yards and 17 touchdowns as a junior at Central High in Independence, Ore.

Cardinal coaches like what they've seen so far from an athlete who played in only two football games as a senior in 2003 because of an injury. "The good thing is he can run, and he didn't disappear when the pads went on," coach David Shaw said. "He has a really good look in his eye as far as wanting to be a contributor."

One of the first questions Stanford coaches had was how long it had been since Pratt got hit hard. "You mean in football?" the right-handed pitcher replied. "Because I've been hit hard in baseball."

In 2003, Pratt signed a national letter of intent to attend Washington State but opted for the Dodgers' \$175,000 signing bonus. He negotiated for a \$120,000 college fund built into the contract after promising his mother he would attend school once he retired.

Pratt labored for seven seasons in the low minors before the Dodgers promoted him to Double-A Chattanooga in 2010. He pitched in eight games for Chattanooga and one for Triple-A Albuquerque last year, yielding 10 runs (eight earned) between the two stops.

His best season came in 2006 when Pratt went 8-4 with a 4.85 ERA in the Single-A South Atlantic League. A Baseball America scouting report described Pratt as having an "electric arsenal" of pitches, including a 94 mph fastball. But his ERA during those eight minor league seasons was 5.98.

While his career stalled in the minors, his mind remained active by reading voraciously on the long bus trips. "Those books kept me alive, kept me sane," said Pratt, a newlywed. "You could just escape when you had a bad outing."

The end came last year when the pitcher suffered from tendinitis in spring training and the Dodgers let him go by summer. Pratt returned to Oregon and worked in the family business of selling ductless heat pumps. He also sought out his high school coach to help him prepare for football. Shane Hedrick rounded up some former players, including his son Grant, a backup quarterback at Boise State.

It wasn't quite Andrew Luck, but Grant Hedrick gave Pratt a taste for what it's like to catch a pass thrown by a Division I quarterback.

Now he'll have to juggle Stanford classes in environmental studies and earth systems, Pac-12 football practices and married life. "He believes he is on a path to do something," said his father, Jeff, an environmental entrepreneur. "I'm not sure he knows what yet." But he has come to Stanford to find out.