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Welcome to another installment of my weekly podcast on University of Virginia athletics. I'm Jeff White from viriniasports.com, and my guest today in our University Hall studio is Jake McCarthy from the UVA baseball team. Jake, good to see you again. How's life as a UVA third year?

We're doing well. I just got back a month ago, and now we're starting up fall ball this past week. So, things are starting to pick up here, and I'm pretty excited.

I think this is the first time I've seen you since the flight back from Fort Worth. You had a busy summer to say at least, starting with your stint on the United States collegiate national team. The list of UVA players who've played on that team over the years includes Ryan Zimmerman, Sean Doolittle, Mark Reynolds, Brandon Kline, and Matt Thaiss. That's obviously good company to keep. What was that experience like for you?

It's definitely something I'll remember for the rest of my life. So many things I learned this summer. It was my actual first collegiate summer ball season after getting injured my freshman year. So, it was definitely cool to play with guys from all around the country.

The USA staff was mostly out-west guys. John Savage being our coach from UCLA and a couple other guys from the state of California. So, it was cool to bounce questions off guys who play in different conferences. And even guys who play in our conference. So, I was roommates with John Aiello. He's from Wake Forest. So, it was kind of cool to become friends with someone who I'm not friends with during the season.

We started off with Chinese Taipei. Then we moved on to Cuba. And then we played Japan. And they were all five-game series. It was definitely a unique situation seeing how they kind of approach the game and how they pitch you at the plate and stuff like that. So, this summer was definitely a huge learning experience.

So you get back from Fort Worth, was the team based in North Carolina?

Yeah. Cary, North Carolina is the USA--

What kind of break did you have after the regional?

Well, we got done, I think, the sixth or the seventh. And they didn't expect me down in Cary until the 18th of June, I believe. So I had a nice 10-day break before things started picking up. But once I got down to Cary, we were playing every day.

So, from the national team, then you move on to the Cape Cod league, where you played for the-- is it Harwich or Harich?

Harwich.

Harwich Mariners. Along with two other UVA players, Justin Novak and Cameron Simmons. That's a wood bat league. What about with the national team? What were you using?

Wood bats.

So both.

Yes.

What's the transition like? I mean, you go through your whole college season, fall and spring, playing with the aluminum bats, and then you have the switch to wood. What's that like?

It's a huge adjustment.

I mean, do you ever play with a wood bat coming up, until that point?

In high school, your summer league-- or at least where I'm from, I would play Legion baseball. And travel baseball, we'd go down south for some exposure for schools. And that was predominately wood. But I think the competition level this summer was definitely higher than that.

You definitely get pitched differently. I think there is an approach, and maybe pitchers aren't afraid to go up and in because, you know, the barrel is smaller. I think some guys would agree that it's harder to turn the barrel with a wooden bat.

So, it's definitely something different, and I think the approach has to be, you know, what you're not used to. And it took me a couple of weeks to get acclimated to that. But I think once I kind of figured out, I enjoyed hitting with the wood bat, and I think a lot of guys on the team would agree with me.

Cape Cod is a storied league in summer ball. What was that like? You got at least two guys there that you know. What's it like kind of living that far from home with a host family playing ball every day?

Yeah, I had an abbreviated stint. I was only up there for about 12 days. And by the time I got there, I think we were eliminated from playoffs. So, maybe I didn't get the--

The full Cape Cod experience?

Yeah. The full Cape Cod experience. But I enjoyed-- my host family was great. I roomed with Cam Simmons. Justin Novak was only there for about two or three days while I was there. I kind of took his spot in the rooming with Cam Simmons. So, that was pretty cool.

But for us three to be down there and playing for Coach Englert-- he's the head coach for the Mariners-- it was fun. And like I said, I met some other guys who play college baseball as well. And it was cool to bounce questions off them to see how their fall ball goes and how they approach their season. So, you know, I continue to learn throughout all these experience. And I hope to keep doing that.

You played a lot of baseball this summer. I know the coaching staff here will sometimes shut down or limit the work of pitchers who've thrown a lot the previous season. Did you get any downtime after you were done in Cape Cod? And did the coaches here say, hey, get away from-- get away from baseball, get away from exercise for a little bit?

Yeah, pretty much. I was still working out after Cape Cod. But like I said, we were eliminated, so we didn't go into the playoffs at all. So, I had the longest amount of time off that you could have. So, I was pretty much without baseball from August 3rd or 4th till the time I came back to school. So, I had a nice two-week break just to kind of rest my body and get ready for fall ball.

It's just a fact of life in college sports, including baseball, that the rosters turn over every 12 months. Guys who were rookies one year find themselves team leaders two years later. That's the situation you are in this year. Are you conscious of the fact that your status in the program has changed when you report back in the fall? And you don't see Pavin Smith. You don't see Adam Hazel. You don't see Ernie. And all of sudden you're one of the older guys.

Yeah. I would say it's different. But I don't think me and Cam Simmons, Daniel Lynch, older guys with experience, really change anything that we're doing. Just like how we witnessed Pavin and Adam and Ernie kind of grow up, nothing really changed with them. I think it has more to do with just your consistent approach every day and how you handle yourself.

We've never really had guys who really talk us up and get us motivated. I just-- Adam Hasely played the outfield with me, and I for two years watched him just be as consistent as he could be. Doesn't really say much. But I think watching him, I learned a lot. And he was the same guy his sophomore year as he was his junior year. So, I don't think I necessarily have to change anything. I just hope I can be a consistent role model for some younger guys on the team.

There's obviously a strong culture, isn't there, in the program about the way coach O'Connor and his assistants

want things done the way they've been done over the years? And it seems like the older guys kind of teach that to the younger ones by example, if nothing else.

Yeah. And I've had so many good role models. My brother being here for three years. And again, Robbie Coleman, who was Joe's freshman roommate, I actually had an extra--

And his 25 years or something like that.

Yeah. I had an extra year with him. So, you know, I've definitely been spoiled with some of the older guys to help me out.

So, you practice every day at what is essentially a construction site. I posted a story on virginiasports.com yesterday about the renovation project at Davenport Field, which is ongoing and is scheduled to wrap up before the home opener in February. You've seen the renderings I know, and you see the steel beams and the heavy machinery every day at the ballpark. As a player, what are your thoughts on the whole project?

We're just excited. Being what the field is going to be in five or six months from now, it's absolutely worth it. And it doesn't really hinder our performance or anything like that. In right field, you can see the pillars going up. And every day, it seems that they're making some pretty good progress from what we see, even though we're there every day. But definitely exciting stuff. And for the steps this program has made in the last 10 years, it's so exciting.

It's early in fall ball, obviously, and you don't play your first exhibition for another two weeks. But what are your early impressions of this team? There have been some big losses. We mentioned Pavin, Adam, Ernie, other guys. So, there's been some turnover, but there is a nucleus back as well.

Yeah. I just think it's a next-man-up mentality. I trust what the coaches have done with us and the development of our players. I think we'll be fine losing Pavin, Adam, Ernie, and all those guys is obviously very tough. But I think we are willing and more than able to accomplish what we need to accomplish.

And these freshmen so far in the last four or five weeks-- although we're not playing fall ball games, and we don't know exactly how good they are and how good they can be-- they've done everything right so far. And they've shown that they're willing to work for what they want. So it's exciting.

It's a large first-year class. Any of those guys, any of the newcomers particularly, jump out at you so far?

Not on a specific level, but I think as a whole, they've just done the right things in the last five weeks for us to be where we need to be at this point. And going into fall ball, I assume they will continue to grow and develop and

hopefully we could do some special things.

Hardcore fans see the video that's posted late every fall about the fitness program that the players go through. Those are just the highlights or the low lights of it. What is that like for a player? What does that entail? Who oversees it? Is that Coach Max's deal? And how hard is it?

I think all the coaches kind of have a hand in it. So, it's a team effort. But it's definitely-- it's difficult, to say the least. But it's the last thing we do for conditioning for the fall semester. So, although it may be hard, it gives you a sense of accomplishment and obviously competition to kind of just wrap up what we've been doing all three, four months of the semester.

So, you guys see it as this big end-of-the-year obstacle course. We're pretty much doing stuff like that-- maybe not as long-- the entire semester. And for it to just kind of be behind us at that point-- and we're taking the next step into Christmas break and getting ready for the season now-- it's a really good feeling.

You have the football background. In conditioning and training for football, they talk about, all right, this is going to help you in the fourth quarter. When everyone else is tired, the work you do now is going to help you push through. Baseball's a little bit of a different animal in that regard. How does the mental toughness you develop in this program manifest itself on the field and help you in the game.

Playing both baseball and football in high school, I would have to say that baseball's probably more mentally wear. There's more mental wear and tear just because you're playing every day. And it's almost like an individual sport because you're the only one in the box and you're the only guy on the mound.

But it's definitely helped so much when you're doubting yourself or there's tough times, which there will be during the season, to go back and have a basis. OK, I accomplished this. You know, I didn't think I was able to do this in the fall, and I ended up doing very well in that and whatever it was-- conditioning or the long fall ball practices. So, it gives you sort of a platform to build off of when things kind of hit the fan. So, it's definitely worth the while.

You missed all but the first six games of the 2016 season at UVA with a toe injury that required surgery. You came back last year to hit 338. You were 27-29 on stolen bases. You led the ACC in steals and in triples. You happy with your season? You played left field most of the time, and then you moved to center when Adam was pitching. Where are you going to play this year? Do you know at this point? Will you be center? Left?

I've been I've been working a lot in center. But, I mean, a lot can happen in the next five months, so we'll see. But as of right now, I've been stationed in center.

How much of an adjustment was it to get back up to game speed last year? And I knew you played in the fall. But

that was your first full college baseball season. And it's a long season, as you alluded to.

Yeah. I think those six games that you just mentioned my freshman year were huge for me. Even though it was a really small stint, I kind of got a better understanding of what game speed is like. They try to simulate that in practice, you know, what we do and how fast the game is. But unless you're out there, I don't think you get a really good feel for how quick the game is.

And for that week that I played, it all happened very fast-- the injury and everything. But I learned a lot from guys like Matt Thaiss even when I was injured-- being on the sideline, understanding what an ACC series is like.

So, when I got back in the fall, I had a better understanding than I did eight months prior. But again, you still need experience. You need to be out there in the box, in the field. So, as the season went on-- this 2017 season-- I learned a lot about myself and continued to develop, and hopefully I'll continue to do that.

As you mentioned, your brother Joe preceded you on the baseball team here. You had the option of signing a pro contract coming out of high school. You opted to go to college obviously. Did you ever seriously consider another college program? Or if you were going to play college ball, was it always going to be UVA?

Yeah. I'm in a unique situation having Joe been here right before I was able to play college sports. And up until about maybe my freshman year of high school, I thought I was going to play football in college. And then I came down here and saw the regionals and the super regionals and the back-to-back College World Series appearances. And I fell in love with it, and I was, like, this is what I want to do. And I was lucky enough for them to offer me, and I jumped on it. It's definitely the right decision, and I'm happy at what I did.

Joe played Double-A ball this summer in Montgomery, Alabama, with the Biscuits, the Montgomery Biscuits. Does your schedule allow you to watch him play in person at all?

No. Yeah, I haven't seen Joe play since-- well, he was in Hudson Valley, which is about an hour and a half from my home in Scranton, Pennsylvania. So, he was up in New York-Penn league. So, after my summer conditioning here, we had, like, 10 days before fall session started. So, I drove up and saw him for one game. So, that would be about two years ago was the last time I saw him play in person.

He's doing well though, right?

Yeah. He is doing very well.

You and Joe do not have a younger brother. How is your dad going to survive without these five-and-a-half-hour trips from Scranton, PA, to Charlottesville?

He'll continue to follow Joe around. And if I'm lucky enough for my career to continue, he'll be following me around. He just retired. I think he had 25 years as a Scranton firefighter, and he retired in March. So, we're proud of him.

Well, regulars at Davenport Field know who your dad is.

Yeah, yeah.

At Scranton High School, you were on the varsity for four years in three different sports-- baseball, football, and basketball. You once rushed for 351 yards in a high school football game. That's not a misprint?

Yeah. That's true.

So, who's faster? You or your brother, and where's your sister Morgan fit in the mix?

Well, I'd be cheating her if I didn't say Morgan. Morgan was pretty fast. I think me and Joe are faster than she was. But she can move. She was a pretty good track star. I'd say I'm a little faster than Joe. But I will say he's about 30 pounds heavier than me. So, yeah, for a 6-3, 230-pound guy, Joe can really move.

I don't know if you are ever walking by the practice football field here when they're out there, or over at JPJ when basketball is going, but do you miss those sports at all? To go from being a three-sport guy, changing every season, to a one-sport guy year round?

Well, it definitely helps that we're busy year round. So, I'm always doing something. But, yeah, I'd be lying if I didn't-- you know, Friday nights in high school football were the best. They were-- especially with the team I played on. I played with the same core of 10 guys when I was seven up until I was 17. So, definitely a cool experience, and I miss it. But that's what I did, and this is what I do now. And I love what I do now.

For those who aren't familiar with your family's athletic exploits, your father, your brother, your sister, and you all wore number 31 in high school. And you and Joe have worn it here. That number was retired at Scranton High School in October 2015, right?

Yep.

So that was your--

My freshman fall here. It was right after I graduated.

Were you able to go back for the ceremony?

Yeah. We actually had a long week. And I think there was a camp up at the Daves, so the coaches gave us, I think, two or three days off. It was perfect timing.

That had to be pretty cool, wasn't it? Yeah. And I drove back on Friday. It was awesome.

Have you ever not worn number 31? Like, what about this summer? Were you able to wear that?

USA, I had 31.

What about Cape Cod?

Harwich, I had five. So, I mean, if we can get it, we can get it. But it's not a huge deal if I can't get the 31.

Right. Once the season starts, the baseball team often plays five games a week. You're balancing baseball, and you're a history major. How challenging is that to be a student athlete here, particularly in baseball, which probably competes more than any team here in terms of a number of competitive events?

Yeah. It's a lot of time management. And like I said, I think I'm a history major partially because I know when a paper is due, and I don't have homework necessarily every single night. So, it's definitely-- I can time-manage ahead of time just so I'm not backed up where there's a week where I have four games and two papers. I can kind of balance it out. And for the most part, I do pretty well not getting too flustered and not being too busy on certain bases.

Are you able to read on the bus, or read on the plane, do school work, or is it hard-- hard when you're in baseball mode?

I've found that I have to be by myself most of the time. Even if I have headphones in or something, if there are other guys around me who could potentially distract me, I'm easily distracted.

Before we sign off, I want to give a shout out to our friend Andrew Ramspacher, who is leaving the "Daily Progress" to cover the Gamecocks for the state newspaper in Columbia, South Carolina. Andrew devoted thousands of hours to covering UVA sports, especially baseball. I know he wrote a lot about your family. We wish him well in Colombia, and we'll miss him in Charlottesville. So good luck to Andrew. Good luck to you this fall and this spring. And thanks for making time for this.

Thanks for having me, Jeff.

Fall break the university starts when classes end tomorrow. So, as far as UVA athletic events in Charlottesville go, it'll be quiet around here this weekend. But check virginiasports.com for schedules and information on all our

sports, including the dates and times for the baseball team's fall exhibitions and the Orange and Blue World Series at Davenport Field. As always, thanks for listening, and I'll be back next week with another podcast.