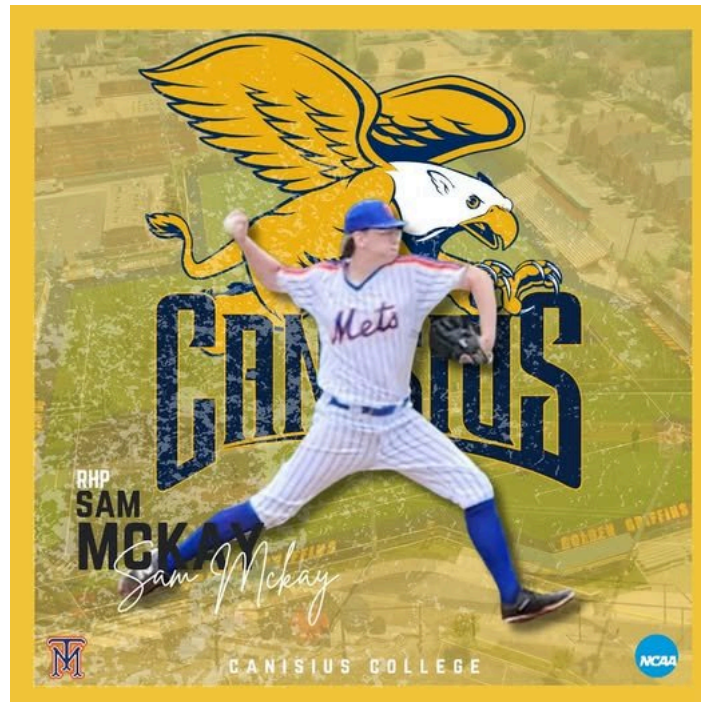


Shushkewich: McKay headed to Canisius



Toronto Mets and Ottawa Nepean Canadians alum Sam McKay (Ottawa, Ont.) is headed to Canisius. Photo: Toronto Mets

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By Tyson Shushkewich

Canadian Baseball Network

Toronto Mets right-hander Sam McKay has committed to Canisius University.

He will be headed to Buffalo to join the Golden Griffins this fall.

“I had some different opportunities pop up, mostly in JUCO ball,” said McKay (Ottawa, Ont.). “I wasn’t as driven to be attending a D1 program as others might be. I had a lot of factors in mind when it came to the next level such as finding a program close to home and finding the right fit, both academically and on the field.”

The Golden Griffins were high on his list and when the opportunity arose, McKay agreed to join the program after visiting the campus and meeting the coaches.

“The second I got on campus down there in Buffalo, I could tell it was the right fit,” said McKay. “The coaching staff has been around for quite some time and when I visited the program, they laid everything out for what they had in store for me and their plans going forward. In today’s world with the roster changes, scholarship opportunities, and the transfer portal, I want to develop in a program through and



roster consists of seven Canucks. Matt Duffy (Toronto, Ont.) holds the distinction of being the highest-drafted Golden Griffin (fourth round, 2023 MLB Draft) while John Axford (Port Dover, Ont.), Connor Panas (Toronto, Ont.), and Brett Siddall (Windsor, Ont.), son of Blue Jays announcer and former big leaguer Joe Siddall, are also Canisius grads.

Interestingly enough, McKay is taking a different approach to playing post-secondary ball. He has already graduated from high school and is currently in a gap year.

While some recent grads might decide to travel overseas or find themselves on a road trip through the mountains, the Ottawa product is getting work this winter ahead of another summer with the Toronto Mets program.

“For me, I thought the gap year was going to help put me ahead of the competition,” said McKay. “Right now, with the Mets program, I am throwing on a pretty set schedule - Monday, get in, go through a warm-up at 120 feet, watch the ball in flight, and then finish the day with a lift in the gym. Throw another gym day in on Tuesday if the body feels good but then Wednesday is bullpen day, building that up and respecting the Mets’ program they have laid out, followed by another set in the gym. Thursday is a bit of a recovery day or maybe a light workout and then on Friday, I throw again followed by a lift on Saturday.”

Without having to contend with schoolwork or the pressures of the latter stages of high school, McKay is focusing all his attention on what lies ahead at Canisius.

“I think the gap year was a great choice because I can get some more work in towards the grind that will come with pitching in D1 baseball. The plan is to step on campus next fall as a freshman on paper but have the buildup and mentality as a sophomore who is ready to face the next level of competition.”

Getting to this point has not been an easy task for the right-hander, as the former Bytown Dodger, Kanata Cub, Watson Elite, and Ottawa Nepean Canadian dealt with some injuries following his showing at the Canadian Futures Showcase in 2022, which was held in Ottawa that summer.

“After the showcase, I wanted to throw 90 (mph) and I focused a lot on my throwing development and not on the whole process – it was mass equals gas in my mind,” said McKay. “I was sitting in the high 80s and as the season got closer, my velocity started to drop and I was really struggling to find my rhythm on the mound. In my first inning that year in the CPBL, I came off the mound and my ribs were on fire and nothing I was doing was making it subside. Essentially I had a lat strain and some rotator cuff issues, throwing harder than what my muscles could take, and my body would adjust to take that pressure off my shoulder issues and that threw everything off.”

While trying to find that velocity mark, McKay found himself doing more harm than good on his body and needed to go back to the drawing board if he wanted to reach his goals. He found himself at the Titan Performance Centre in his hometown to get



weight and get stronger physically,” said McKay. “Simplifying the arm action while utilizing my lower half so that my arm wouldn’t drag behind, which was causing me some discomfort and led to some of those issues I was experiencing. I was able to revamp the mechanics and develop a better path for my arm action to get more out of my whole body – both the lower half and my rotation with my throwing arm.”

With his arm issues behind him and a ticket to Canisius punched later this year, McKay’s path to D1 baseball is a bit unorthodox but one that could gain some traction in the coming years to help players prepare themselves for the next step in their respective playing careers.

With the off-season coming to an end, the 6-foot-3 righty is looking forward to another summer with the Mets and pitching at some of the different showcases with an 18U squad that boasts some other impressive names in Keegan Russell (Whitby, Ont.) and 12 other players with college ball commitments.

“The Toronto Mets have been a huge influence for me and my development on the field,” explained McKay. “They boast a huge list of alumni that have success at so many levels and their coaching staff is unmatched. Pitching coordinator Jordan Prosper was able to bring in some new understandings of my pitching mechanics when I was struggling and he played a big part in helping me back on track along with my conditioning back in Ottawa. I can’t wait for the next season and what we can accomplish.”



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