

## Living the Dream: Rowan Pitcher Ryan Kulik's Summer on the Cape

It's a cool morning in early November. The first frost of the season is beginning to lift off the Rowan University baseball field. Rowan pitcher Ryan Kulik sits on the top of a dugout bench in Glassboro and stares intently at the vacant diamond.

Fall ball has long since ended. Kulik, now a senior at Division-III Rowan, reminisces about this past summer, when he got the opportunity of a lifetime; a chance to play in the prestigious Cape Cod Baseball League.

"It's been my dream since I was about 12 years old. I heard about it awhile ago, and I talked to my coach and told him that I would love to play up there," Kulik said.

The Cape Cod League boasts nearly 200 alumni who saw time in the Majors this season. One in seven major league players played summer ball on the Cape. This past summer, 222 former players were selected in the June amateur draft, including 21 of the first 64 picks.

Rowan head coach Juan Ranero, who served as the pitching coach for the Yarmouth-Dennis Red Sox from 1990 to 1996, used his contacts to help Kulik sign a temporary contract with the Red Sox.

"While teams were finalizing their rosters and some of the kids were playing in the College World Series and trying out for the Team USA rosters and haven't made the cut yet, teams take a couple of players," said Ranero. "There are only ten teams, so it's very limited. There are very few players that can play in this league and everybody wants a chance."

Kulik arrived on the Cape in early June; coaching youth baseball clinics by day, and pitching under the lights by night.

"I stood on the mound right before I pitched and thought "wow, I can't believe I'm actually here right now playing in the Cape Cod Baseball League," said Kulik. I completed one goal in my life."

Kulik struggled initially with Y-D, allowing four earned runs in three games, all in relief. He was the only Division-III player on the Red Sox, facing off against lineups that commonly featured several players who will likely one day play in the majors.

"You can't even explain it," said Kulik. "D-III baseball here is great. We have the best conference in the nation, but up there, every hitter you're facing is the top hitter on his team so you don't get a break in the lineup. Division-III, you'll get a couple kids that you know can't hit a fastball so you can throw it, but up there you have to locate every single pitch and you can't make any mistakes at all. If you make a mistake, you're going to get hurt."

As players returned to the Yarmouth-Dennis roster, the team no longer had room on its roster for the Marlton native.

"When they told me, I said 'as long as I'm here, I'm fine'" said Kulik.

He was transferred to the Harwich Mariners, where he was once again the only non Division-I player on the team.

"That was actually my main concern going up there. On the first day when everybody was introducing themselves and saying 'I'm so and so from Georgia or Kentucky, and I'm just sitting there saying 'I'm from Rowan.' It took them a little while to get used to it, but I fit in right away. When they saw what I could do, I was just another guy on the team."

Kulik's season turned around in Harwich, where he took up a role in the Mariners' starting rotation.

He appeared in six games, starting five of them. The 5'11, 205 pound lefty allowed 31 hits in 24 2/3 innings, while posting a 1-3 record with a 5.47 earned run average.

Kulik's season was highlighted by his second start in Harwich. On July 14<sup>th</sup> against the Wareham Gatemen, Kulik pitched seven innings of shutout ball, en route to earning his first Cape League win.

"The Mariners were a last place team, but it was a blast. It was the best time of my life."

"On scout day, he was throwing 88-89 from the left side which is pretty good," said Ranero. "I think the fact that he can throw three pitches consistently for strikes is what helps him. That's what enabled him to go and be able to pitch up there."

"I got asked the question 'why are you playing Division-III baseball?'" said Kulik. "And I tell them that it was just the best fit for me. I wanted to play D-I but I didn't get any big looks out of high school at all."

Kulik has thrived during his three seasons at Rowan. The 2006 New Jersey Athletic Conference pitcher of the year has exploited hitters with a devastating curveball and good command of three pitches, compiling a 3.25 career ERA for the Profs.

"It's great competition," Ranero said. "When I was up there, we had 15-20 of the national cross-checkers of each team coming to see players, and they equated the talent to about Double-A, so imagine guys that are one phone call away from going to the big leagues and that's what you see up there talent wise."

"It's something that I'll never forget," Kulik said. "I have a picture in my mind every time I think about it, just standing on that mound. It's not the pros, but 2,000 people in a little ballpark is a lot, and seeing 20 scouts raise guns every time you throw, it's kind of intimidating. They're here to watch me. It's unreal."

Ranero notes that although Kulik is talented, the attitude he brings to the Profs may be as important as anything he does on the mound.

"He's good, but he's not just going to sit on being good," said Ranero. "He's going to work his tail off to try to get better. The other player see that."

As Kulik prepares for the upcoming 2008 season at Rowan, he has an increased confidence that he can compete with the top talent in the country.

"The biggest lesson I learned is that it really doesn't matter who you are or where you're from," said Kulik. "If you're good enough, they'll find you."