

2005 College Summer Player of the Year: Andrew Miller

By Will Kimmey
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Andrew Miller understands their plight.

"Pitchers have a big advantage in summer leagues. It's almost unfair to give a hitter a metal bat all year and then make him use wood for a few months," the 6-foot-6 lefthander said.

Just because Miller understands the difficulty doesn't mean he feels --or shows--any compassion. Instead, he dismissed nearly every Cape Cod League batter during his two summers with the Chatham A's. The rising junior at North Carolina went 8-0, 1.82 in 89 combined innings, averaging 11.5 strikeouts and 4.1 hits allowed per nine innings.

Miller's mid-90s fastball--the two-seam variety which runs all over the place--and hard-breaking slider make those numbers possible, and those two plus pitches make hitters uncomfortable. Some referred to him as the Cape's Big Unit, while others simply asked for off days when he was listed as the probable starter.

Chatham coach John Schiffner explained why: "I'm not going to say this kid's name, but it was a righthanded hitter. He swung and missed at a slider that hit him right in the thigh. I'd seen him hit guys in the back foot on slider strikeouts last summer, but this thing was thigh-high and he swung as it hit him. He had no chance.

"We kept it very calm (in the dugout) because we didn't want to show him up. But some guys had to bite their sleeve to not laugh out loud."

SUMMER PLAYER OF THE YEAR PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984	Will Clark, 1b, Team USA
	Rafael Palmeiro, of, Hutchinson (Jayhawk)
1985	Jeff King, 3b, Team USA
	Bob Zupcic, of, Liberal (Jayhawk)
1986	Jack Armstrong, rhp, Wareham (Cape Cod)
	Mike Harkey, rhp, Fairbanks (Alaska)
1987	Cris Carpenter, rhp, Team USA
1988	Robin Ventura, 3b, Team USA
	Ty Griffin, 2b, Team USA
1989	John Olerud, 1b-lhp, Palouse (Alaska)
1990	Calvin Murray, of, Anchorage Bucs (Alaska)
1991	Chris Roberts, of, Team USA
1992	Jeffrey Hammonds, of, Team USA
1993	Geoff Jenkins, of, Team USA
1994	Steve Carver, 1b, Anchorage Glacier Pilots (Alaska)
1995	Travis Lee, 1b, Team USA
1996	Seth Greisinger, rhp, Team USA
1997	Pat Burrell, 3b, Team USA
1998	Bobby Kielty, of, Bourne (Cape Cod)
1999	Xavier Nady, 3b, Team USA
2000	Mark Teixeira, 3b, Team USA
2001	Bobby Brownlie, rhp, Team USA
2002	Brad Sullivan, rhp, Team USA
2003	Jered Weaver, rhp, Team USA
2004	Daniel Carte, of, Falmouth (Cape Cod)

The laugh-out-loud moments were outnumbered by the times when Miller proved impressively efficient, as he became the first Cape Cod League pitcher to win Baseball America's Summer Player of the Year Award since 1986. He was more apt to throw two-seamers to entice groundouts than to work deep counts. That tack allowed Miller to meet his goal of averaging seven innings per start while yielding 50 total baserunners--23 walks, 22 hits and five hit batsmen--in 49 innings. He still piled up 69 strikeouts. (That's 12.1 K's per nine and a .133 average against, math fans.)

"He pitched this summer more than he did last summer. Last summer he just threw," Schiffner said. "In some cases he was fine getting guys out at 88 (mph) and using his slider to set up his fastball. When he needed to get an out, he would be 96-97."

Miller worked more 2-2 and 3-2 counts during the summer of 2004, often reaching his 100-pitch limit in the fourth inning. So he ended up with just two decisions. He reached the seventh inning in all but one of his 2005 starts, earning six wins.

Schiffner offers a reminder that Miller was nearly as scary a year ago, when he received less run support and had a 12-strikeout game through four innings erased by a fog cancellation. Yet the pitcher posits that a year of experience on the Cape and another year of development at North Carolina also increased his success in his second go-round. Not that he's content yet.

"I've got to stop giving free passes," he said. "I hit too many guys, walked too many guys. I walked more batters than hits I gave up."

Command issues dogged Miller as a senior at Buchholz High in Gainesville, Fla., pushing him to the Devil Rays atop the third round after he opened the spring of 2003 with a first-round label.

Miller's summer, stature and stuff all point to him becoming a strong candidate to start 2006 with an even bigger tag: potential top overall pick.

"It's weird to think about that," Miller said. "It's too far away and anything can happen. I went through that in high school. The chances of everything staying the same are slim and none."

Schiffner agreed--because he believes Miller will continue to improve, citing the work ethic and leadership abilities the 20-year-old displayed during his second summer season. The coach ranks Miller with Mark Mulder and Barry Zito as the best lefthanders he's witnessed during his time coaching on the Cape, which dates to 1978.

"He's definitely one of the top pitchers I've seen here," Schiffner said. "His upside is tremendous because he's so fluid. He's not the same type of pitcher as Mulder or Zito, but their dominance was the same."