

NCAA baseball champ finds new home at Kirkwood

Written by Jim Ecker

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Most of the baseball players at Kirkwood Community College can only dream about playing in the College World Series in Omaha and winning an NCAA title.

Greg Brodzinski has already done it.

Brodzinski was a freshman catcher at South Carolina in 2011 when the Gamecocks won the NCAA Division I title with a 5-2 victory over Florida before 26,721 fans at TD Ameritrade Park.

Brodzinski was in the bullpen when South Carolina got the final out. He raced onto the field and joined the dogpile.

"I'll never forget that," he said Friday. "It's like in the movies."

Brodzinski anticipated becoming one of Carolina's top catchers in 2012, but a fifth-year senior was granted a special sixth year of eligibility for 2012 and Brodzinski decided to transfer to Coastal Carolina rather than being a reserve with the Gamecocks again.

He knew he'd be ineligible at Coastal Carolina in 2012 due to NCAA transfer rules, but the Coastal Carolina coach had recruited him in high school and he was willing to practice with Coastal Carolina for a year before starting to play in 2013.

Unfortunately for Brodzinski, the Coastal Carolina coach left after the 2012 campaign for another job and Brodzinski decided to move again. His prep travel team coach with the South Florida Bandits had connections at Kirkwood and suggested he give the Eagles a look.

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Brodzinski visited with new Kirkwood Coach Todd Rima and made the move to Cedar Rapids.

"He seems like a real genuine guy and it all worked out," said Brodzinski. "I decided to make the next step and now I'm at Kirkwood."

Brodzinski, 6-foot-3 and 215 pounds, is hitting .333 so far for Kirkwood as the No.1 catcher. He also plays first base and has served as the designated hitter.

He has driven in seven runs for the Eagles, who have compiled a 10-2 record so far.

"It's been great," said Brodzinski, who is from New Jersey. "It's definitely a lot colder than I imagined.

"When I got out here it was about negative degrees for the first couple of weeks. It's a lot different from South Carolina, but I love my teammates, I love my coaches.

"We have a great team and I feel like we can do big things. I have that same feeling I had my freshman year at South Carolina, with how united we are and the talent we have.

"We don't feel like we will lose."

Brodzinski was rated the No.2 high school prospect in New Jersey in 2010 by Perfect Game USA when he hit .510 with 11 home runs and 47 RBIs. He had workouts with the Yankees, Phillies, Red Sox and Washington Nationals at their Major League parks and anticipated being drafted.

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"The draft came and I got calls around the seventh round or 11th round a bunch of times, but the numbers didn't match up with what I was looking for (as a signing bonus)," he said. "Once they passed up on me, they called me later in the draft.

"Basically it was not a good situation and I decided to go to South Carolina."

Brodzinski appeared in 10 games for the Gamecocks in 2011. He hit .333 (4 for 12) with two RBIs and enjoyed his year at South Carolina, even though he did not get to play a lot.

"It was a great experience," he said. "There were a lot of great guys. Everyone on our team was close.

"The fan support at South Carolina was unreal. We would have anywhere from 6,000 to 10,000 fans at every game."

The Gamecocks finished with a 55-14 record in 2011. Brodzinski, 21, did not get to play in the College World Series, but he was excited about the future until catcher Robert Beary was granted that extra year of eligibility.

"It was tough," he said. "Being behind somebody that established, you don't really get as many opportunities.

"It was a good year," he added. "I learned a lot."

Brodzinski will be eligible for the Major League draft again this June. He said the scouts know he's at Kirkwood and are keeping tabs on his career.

"When I was home over Christmas break I worked out with the Phillies and the Reds and I've

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talked to numerous scouts that I talked to out of high school," he said. "They want to see me have a good season and everything will work out.

"All of them know I'm out here. It's just about playing and having a good year."

Brodzinski is from Turnersville, N.J., and played at Bishop Eustace High School. He played with Los Angeles Angels star Mike Trout on a 14U team in New Jersey and competed against Trout in high school.

"When he was a senior and I was a junior, there were a lot of scouts there, a lot of fun," said Brodzinski. "They had a real good team every year and we had a real good team.

"There was high energy and a lot of fans every time we played."

Brodzinski could sign a pro contract this summer if he likes his spot in the draft and the bonus. Otherwise, he still has two more years of eligibility and could play college baseball again next season.

Brodzinski does not sound bitter about his baseball path so far.

"I experienced something my freshman year that only a small percentage of college baseball players get to feel," he said. "That was amazing in itself. I've learned a lot the last two years."