

Howell would listen to pro offer

Written by Jim Ecker
Sunday, 29 April 2018 05:03 -



Kirkwood shortstop Korrey Howell could have a big decision to make this summer, but there are no bad options.

He could turn pro and play baseball for a living if he's drafted high enough and likes the offer, or he could play for the Iowa Hawkeyes next season and join one of the top programs in the Big Ten.

He could turn pro, make money and not have to wake up early for classes. Or he could move to Iowa City and play for the Hawks.

Howell was selected in the 19th round of the Major League draft last summer by Kansas City, but he'd already decided to stick with Kirkwood for his sophomore year and declined a modest offer from the Royals.

This time he'll be tempted to go play in the minor leagues if he likes the possibilities.

"If I'm drafted - the right team and the right spot and the right comfort for me and my family - yeah, definitely, I'd consider it," he said Saturday.

Howell has been red-hot for the 10th-ranked Eagles in the last four games, going 11 for 15 with four doubles, a triple, two home runs and seven RBIs. He's hitting .379 and playing shortstop with grace and great skill, as always.

Howell went 5-for-8 Saturday with a double, triple, home run and five RBIs as Kirkwood split a conference doubleheader with Ellsworth, winning 11-1 in six innings after dropping the opener, 5-3.

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Howell, who hails from Chicago, thought he needed another year of seasoning in college before playing ball for money. That's why he rebuffed the Royals.

"Personally I didn't think I was ready yet," he said. "Emotionally and physically, I don't think I was at that level yet as far as who I wanted to become.

"But this year, I'm a completely different person. I've matured over the past year and we'll see what happens."

Howell might have been drafted even higher than the 19th round last year, but he discouraged teams from calling him name before the draft began. The Royals picked him anyway, hoping he'd change his mind.

"I was telling teams that I wasn't going to sign. I wasn't ready," he said. "And I was making sure people knew that. I didn't want them making a mistake and taking me when I'm not 100 percent ready."

The slotted bonus for the last pick in the 10th round of the 2017 draft was \$131,000, so Howell probably would have been looking at much less from Kansas City in the 19th round.

"The 19th round, it's nothing big," he said. "It was nothing life-changing."

The 2018 draft will be held in June and a lot of people like Howell for his superb athletic ability, fluid motions and hitting ability. He set a school record last year with 43 stolen bases for Kirkwood and displays a great feel for the game.

He knows he'll probably have to make a big decision this summer between pro ball and the Hawkeyes, but that can wait.

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"I'm not really worried about that until the end of the season," he said. "We still have work to do here. And once we're done here, that's going to be next on my mind."

There's been a certain amount of speculation that Howell might find himself in center field in pro baseball some day, but he's a shortstop at heart and always has been.

"I've been playing shortstop since I can remember playing baseball," he said. "It's the most skillful position, it's the coolest position on the field growing up.

"Everything about shortstop just makes baseball better for me. I've worked hard at it all my life. And here I am."

Howell is a lifelong White Sox fan and knows all about the Cubs, but he's certainly not limiting his options to the home-town teams.

"The White Sox would be a dream for me. I grew up a diehard Chicago White Sox fan. I've never rooted for any other team in my life. But no, it doesn't have to be specifically those two," he said.

He would play for anybody.

"If I like them they like me and it seems like the perfect fit for me, I would pull the trigger," he said.

Howell belted a two-run homer in the bottom of the seventh inning of the opener to pull Kirkwood within 5-3, but the rally ended there and the Eagles dropped Game 1.

Kirkwood led 10-1 in the bottom of the sixth inning of the nightcap when Howell laced an RBI

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single to left field to make it 11-1 and end the game by the college mercy rule.

Cameron Leff (7-1) pitched a three-hitter for Kirkwood in the second game. The Eagles caught a tough break in the opener when Hunter Lee, who has signed with Iowa, appeared a little "tight" to Coach Todd Rima so he made a pitching change after two innings to play it safe.

Kirkwood and Ellsworth are scheduled for another doubleheader Sunday at 1 p.m. at Kirkwood.

The split left Kirkwood at 33-11-1 overall and 15-4-1 in the conference. The Eagles are locked in a tight battle with Southeastern and NIACC for the regular-season title and the No. 1 seed in the regional tournament.

Southeastern sits in first place at 18-4, with Kirkwood at 15-4-1 and NIACC at 15-6-1. Kirkwood and Southeastern have a four-game series next Friday and Saturday.

Ellsworth is 13-34 overall and 10-12 in the conference.

GAME 1

Ellsworth █ █ █ 012 101 0 - 5

Kirkwood █ █ █ 000 010 2 - 3

L - Lee.

GAME 2

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W - Leff.