

BY STEVEN LEVENTHAL

YOUNG Ace

**MATT HARVEY
CREDITS HIS TAR
HEEL EXPERIENCE
FOR HIS QUICK
RISE TO THE
TOP OF THE MLB
PITCHING RANKS.**



Getty/McIsaac

Matt Harvey grew up outside of New York City in suburban Connecticut, where he dreamed of playing in Yankee pinstripes. He eventually realized his goal of playing in the Big Apple but probably never envisioned that he'd be wearing the blue and orange of the Mets. Undoubtedly, some of that drive and determination came from Harvey's father, Edward, himself a former college player at Connecticut, who coached his young prodigy in high school.

John Schiffner, who would go on to manage Harvey on his Cape Cod Summer League team, faced Ed Harvey's team in a conference tournament game when Matt was just a high school freshman. At the time, the younger Harvey was fourth in the team's rotation, yet struck out 13 of Schiffner's batters, giving up only one hit. Schiffner recalls, "His dad told me when he was a freshman in high school, after he beat us, that he was going to pitch for me in Chatham when he goes to college. "

After high school, Matt was selected in the third round of the 2007 draft. He was initially projected to go higher, but was seeking money from the Angels in the \$2 million range. As negotiations were dragging out, the August 15th deadline drew nearer, and Harvey had a big decision to make: take the lesser money being offered, or go to college and try again in three years time. Fortunately for Tar Heel fans, Matt decided on Chapel Hill.

According to UNC Baseball coach Mike Fox, “Matt was very talented when he arrived at UNC. Live fastball, good mechanics, and feel for his delivery. His father had done a great job with him.”

Harvey had a stellar freshman year, going 7-2, with a 2.79 ERA, and striking out 80 batters in 67 2/3 innings. That earned him All-America honors from at least one publication. His second year saw his ERA and walk totals rise, but Matt rebounded his junior year with totals strong enough to be named all-conference.

When asked about Harvey's progress at UNC, Fox offers, "He gained a further appreciation for his talent, his teammates, being at UNC, pursuing his degree. He became a leader with the help of some great teammates."

Ed Harvey's prediction did indeed come true as Matt went to Cape Cod during his two summers at Carolina, and played for Schiffner's Chatham Anglers. "Matt had a solid summer for us his freshman year, but his second summer was not as successful. He struggled so much we had to move him to the bullpen for a portion of that summer," states Schiffner. "He did show glimmers of things to come, but he struggled with mechanics, velocity, and confidence. What impressed me the most was that he went back to Carolina and figured things out, and had a fabulous spring and went on to be a first-round pick."

Those summers in New England forged a strong bond between the two men. Matt returned to Chatham and spent a good deal of time with Schiffner as negotiations were taking place with the Mets, who had chosen Matt as the seventh overall pick in the 2010 draft. Schiffner notes, “We had a chance to get out on my boat and do some fishing, and it was very refreshing just spending time with him away from the field. You could see then that he had the makeup to handle what was ahead of him.”

Harvey began his pro career at St. Lucie, with the Mets' affiliate in the Florida State League. He also spent time in Binghamton, New York with the club's AA team. By 2012, Matt had moved

up another rung, to the AAA Buffalo Bison, before being called up to the big leagues for good.

In late July, with the Carolina coaching staff in attendance, Harvey debuted at Arizona, and struck out 11 Diamondbacks in 5 1/3 innings, giving up only three hits, in a 3-1 victory. Just for good measure, Matt even smacked a double in his first major league at bat.

New York pitching coach Dan Warthen offered up quite an assessment: "He's an outstanding teammate, and an outstanding friend. He's a baseball junkie, who loves the game, loves the people around him, works hard, and picks up things around him. I don't have enough good adjectives to say about the young man. I've been here a long time, and I don't know that I've known or seen anybody embrace the game and understand the game as well as he has."

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Matt ran off a string of stellar performances to start the 2013 season, earning National League player of the month honors, and the prestigious selection as starting pitcher for the All-Star game, being contested at the Mets' home park of Citi Field.

“He’s got tremendous determination to be great,” states Mets manager Terry Collins. “That drives him each and every time he goes out there. He expects so much of himself. He almost has to prove it to himself. Even though he’s pitched great at times, there’s things he knows he needs to get better at. When you’re driven, you’re going to be good. “

The sudden notoriety led to a memorable appearance on the Jimmy Fallon show, where the host had Matt posing as a reporter, asking unsuspecting fans what they think of Matt Harvey. The show was a hit on air and the online video of it went viral, garnering millions of views.

Unfortunately for Harvey, his season ended early when it was discovered in late August that he had a partially torn tendon in his elbow.

He spoke with *Inside Carolina* in Los Angeles prior to the injury. The Fallon piece showed that he has quite a sense of humor and he is also incredibly well-grounded for someone who is just 24 years of age. Fox adds, "Seeing his success at the Major League level makes us proud of him and rewarding in a small way. We are glad he is a Tar Heel."

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Talk about your decision to go to Carolina and wait on your pro career.

It was a tough go-around. That was the first year of the deadline [August 15th]. Between making a decision as an 18-year-old whether to start a pro career, or go to college, and then make that decision to go to college I had pretty much two days to pack up and hit the road for school. It's a tough thing to grasp. I think in the long run, it made me a lot tougher as a

person, as an athlete. The decision to go to school was one of the best I ever made.

What was it like, being in Chapel Hill?

I took me a while, because I had some things going on with Major League Baseball and the draft in '07. I didn't necessarily want to go to college. It was kind of a tough time for me. It took a couple of months. I was going to an 8-o'clock class one morning. I don't know what hit me, but it was one of those moments when I was walking through the quad, and kind of stopped and looked around, and realized that I was in such a special place. That was a huge moment for me. That was when things turned over. Not just baseball-wise, but as a person, as a teammate, as a friend. Growing as a man. That was a big moment for me.

Who are you still in touch with from your UNC days?

I talk to Mark Fleury a lot, Colin Bates, Tim Federowicz; It's a big family. We all talk. Alex White, Tim Fedroff. There's so many that we all keep in contact. We actually went on a team cruise. There were about 10 of us, this past offseason, that took a cruise to the Bahamas. We're obviously all still in contact, and have such a good relationship. It's a big family.

What's it like being a baseball player at a school where basketball and football are dominant?

It was awesome. I played two years in the new stadium. They did such a great job with everything. The coaching staff, the baseball family that North Carolina has, it is indescribable how behind you they are. It wasn't bad. Being an athlete, you get to hang out with other athletes. So I was hanging out with Marcus Ginyard, Deon Thompson, Ty Lawson, and [Tyler] Hansbrough. You get to meet those guys and hang out with them, watch them now and then. It's a special place.

How does the Duke–Carolina rivalry extend into baseball?

They seem to always play us well. Not knocking their program or anything, but they showed up to play against us, that's for sure. Games against N.C. State, Duke, or even Wake Forest, in state, you want to go there and whup up on them. If you're an athlete in one sport, you want to hold it down for all other sports, too. We definitely didn't take them lightly, or the series lightly. It was fun to be physically a part of that, rather than just noticing the basketball. I went to a couple of those games, and when you see the basketball guys beat up on Duke, then you want to do the same on a baseball field.

What were some of your favorite places in Chapel Hill to hang out or eat?

Obviously, Top of the Hill is a very special place. I had the opportunity to go there after they won the basketball championship [in 2009.] Being up there for that, seeing Franklin Street get rushed by a hundred-thousand people. I was also up there for Halloween, and you get to look down and see all the students dressed up. You know, it's a special place. It's so much fun. We loved it there. Anytime I go back I always go to Top of the Hill.





How did your summers in Cape Cod help you as a baseball player?

It was awesome. It was such a good experience playing—growing up; whether it was watching the [2001 Warner Bros.] movie “Summer Catch” with Jessica Biel and Freddie Prinze, Jr. You look at that and that’s the place you want to go if you’re a college baseball player. I had the opportunity to go play for Chatham twice. And the things that Schiffner does up there. The memory, the friends, you look back at some of your teammates who are now in the big leagues, or former players who have played there, and you have something to talk about. It’s Cape Cod, it’s a special place.

[* author's note: Schiffner's boat is named "Summer Catch"]

What was your first appearance in the big leagues like?
And how about the All-Star game start?

The experience of doing that; it was touching when the whole Carolina staff was there. My family was there. Coach Fox was there, Coach (Scott) Forbes was there, Coach (Scott) Jackson. They were in Arizona last year for my debut. And they were at the All-Star game for my start there. It's where you want to be. I dreamed of being an All-Star, and had that opportunity. It's been a great ride, and hopefully I can keep it going for a long time.

What effect has all the media attention had on you, such as being on Jimmy Fallon?

It's been fun. It's been a lot of fun. It's somewhere I've always wanted to be. I've always enjoyed that kind of stuff, and the Fallon thing was absolutely an amazing experience, and so much fun. I've gotten such good feedback from it. It's been awesome. I love doing stuff like that, and hopefully it will continue.

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Some players and people haven't taken to the celebrity life so well.

I knew growing up that if I wanted to be an elite player, that things were going to come with that. Growing up in Connecticut and seeing how the New York media worked at a young age with Derek Jeter, and Mariano Rivera, and Alex Rodriguez. Different ways, obviously in the media, how things have played out. You have certain players who have done well and, certain players who haven't, and obviously you want to be on the end of the positives. Learning that through experiences, and I've learned the hard way of how not to do things, and I've learned how to do things the right way. I'm still young and still learning things, but I've got a great support staff; the Boras people [agent Scott Boras] have been nothing but amazing, especially their marketing staff. They're putting me in the right direction.

What kind of camaraderie do you have with UNC as a pro athlete?

Everywhere you go, you seem to run into somebody that's been to UNC. Two days [before this interview] someone was screaming from the stands that they went to North Carolina and were a fellow Tar Heel. It's cool to hear, it's cool to be part of something like that. I had an opportunity to forgo college and go to the pros right out of high school, but like I said, going to college was the best decision I've ever made. Being able to go back and say, 'I went here.' You know, I put on a uniform that these guys are wearing. Even if it's not a basketball uniform, it's still a Tar Heel uniform. ■