

SPORTS

‘I never expected I would become who I became’



Photos by Meagan Deanne / The Forum

Fargo-Moorhead RedHawks pitcher Carter Hope sits in the RedHawks dugout Tuesday, July 30, at Newman Outdoor Field.

RedHawks reliever hoping people learn from his story of drug addiction

By Chris Murphy
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Fargo

Carter Hope sat in the parking lot outside the Renaissance Hotel in Tulsa, Okla. He had failed a drug test issued by Major League Baseball a few weeks prior. He knew what was coming. An official from player development for the Kansas City Royals was waiting inside the hotel to ask him what was going to change this time. Hope had lost track of how many drug tests issued by the Royals he had failed, maybe six or seven. This was his first failed drug test issued by MLB. He smoked two OxyContin pills in the parking lot and walked in the hotel with no idea how to answer. In June of 2013, he was drafted in the third round by the Royals. The day after he was drafted, he pitched The Woodlands High School to a state championship, throwing a complete game. By December of 2015, Hope, high on OxyContin, was walking into a meeting about a failed drug test with no answer how his drug addiction was going to change. The Royals released the 20-year-old a week later. He cried when he received the phone call.

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Carter Hope stands for the national anthem on Tuesday, July 30, at Newman Outdoor Field.

Fargo Post 2 clinches Class AA state title

By Greg DeVillers
Forum News Service

GRAND FORKS — In his first two seasons pitching for Fargo Post 2, Taylor Parrett played on two state champion American Legion baseball teams. That title eluded Post 2 last season, Parrett’s third with the team. But Fargo bounced back this season. On Tuesday, Post 2 won its fourth state title in the past five seasons, defeating the Grand Forks Royals 7-0 in the title game of the North Dakota Class AA American Legion baseball tournament.



Eric Hylden / Forum News Service

Fargo Post 2 players celebrate their state championship in the North Dakota Class AA American Legion state baseball tournament Tuesday, July 30, in Grand Forks.

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MVFC commissioner says league continues to be committed to FCS football

By Jeff Kolpack
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FARGO — The Missouri Valley Football Conference state of address this week by commissioner Patty Viverito was another in the line of easy ones. There’s been plenty of positivity over the last several years. The league put three teams in the Division I FCS playoffs last season and all won at least one game. North Dakota State and South Dakota State, reached the semifinals, which made it four times in the last five years the Valley has had two teams



Viverito

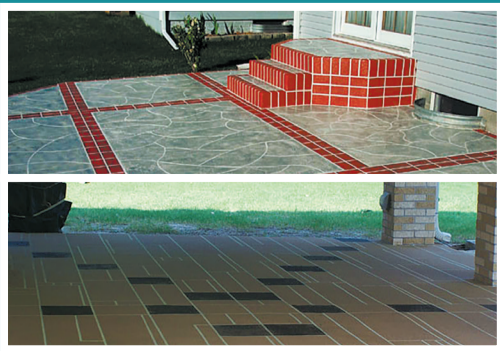
in the final four. The only commissioner the league has ever known pointed to NDSU’s seven national titles in eight years, a span in which the Valley has made the championship game eight straight years, which is an FCS record. In the last decade, the Valley owns a 59-25 post-season record making it

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MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS FOOTBALL

Fleck: ‘I haven’t been this excited ... in a very long time’

By Andy Greder
St. Paul Pioneer Press

MINNEAPOLIS — After being blown out by a combined score of 70-0 in the final two games of 2017, Gophers football coach P.J. Fleck saw his team wilt down the stretch, so going into last year, he preached a “refuse to lose” mindset.

The Gophers finished strong with their first win over Wisconsin in 14 years and a victory in the Quick Lane Bowl to close 2018, so Fleck has updated his approach. This year, he said Tuesday, July 30, is “about learning how to truly win games.”

As a slogan, it doesn’t exactly roll off the tongue, but that’s irrelevant as the Gophers look to improve on last year’s 7-6 record.

“The education is going to be about how games are won,”



Jeff Hanisch / USA TODAY Sports
Minnesota Golden Gophers head football coach P.J. Fleck looks on during a November 2018 game.

Fleck said. “How can this football team maximize the win column the best it possibly can?”

Pundits have varying responses to that question, but Fleck and his staff have created

what they believe is a winning formula: When a team misses fewer tackles than the opponent, wins the turnover margin and has more plays of 20-plus yards, it has a 78 percent chance of winning.

“When we did that (in 2018), we were 7-0,” Fleck said. “And when we didn’t do it, we were 0-6.”

After the way last year ended, Minnesota received early buzz to be a potential Top 25 team this fall. When July rolled around, that wasn’t reflected by Big Ten reporters, who collectively picked the Gophers to finish sixth in the seven-team West Division.

Fleck shed some light on how he feels the Gophers will be this fall.

“I haven’t been this excited for a training camp in a very long time because I love coaching this group of guys,” he said.

Gophers senior defensive end Carter Coughlin is more outwardly bullish on the team.

“If we keep building upon what we did last year against Wisconsin and how we finished really strong as an entire team offense and defense, we should be really, really good this year,” he said.

The Gophers have 78 percent of their production from last year returning this fall; that leads the Big Ten West.

“It’s hard not to look at the team that we have right now and say it’s not something special,” Coughlin said. “We have depth in a lot of positions, we have playmakers in a lot of different positions, offense and defense.”

“As long as the offense and defense continue to get better throughout fall camp and keep clicking, it’s going to be really special.”

HOPE

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“Everything within me wanted something to change,” Hope said. “I didn’t have the strength or power to overcome my addictions at that time. I knew the position I was in, I knew the struggles I had. I knew I was in no way, shape or form any value to their organization other than the investment they had made in me. It hurt. It was another shortcoming of mine that continued to lead me into a place of darkness.”

Baseball Chapel is an organization that provides Christian chaplains to professional baseball teams. A chaplain comes out every Sunday for the Fargo-Moorhead RedHawks. This season, Hope, now a 24-year-old reliever for the RedHawks, was asked to tell his story in the dugout during a Sunday prayer session.

“There were a lot of tears,” RedHawks manager Jim Bennett said.

Each day Barb Hope-Rea drives to work from her Tulsa home she has a reminder of a night Carter, high on heroin and Xanax, fell asleep at the wheel and plowed his Nissan into a light pole at 75 miles per hour. The crash was a few months after the Royals released him. That was when Carter began doing heroin. As his bank account began to plummet, Carter’s drug dealer mentioned that heroin was cheaper than OxyContin. He remembers the first time he tried it.

“I was enthralled by the way I felt and the numbness I felt from all the guilt and shame I had built up,” Carter said.

He and the two passengers in the car came out without a scratch, running a mile from the scene back to a friend’s apartment. Carter bought an Audi F5 two-door coupe when the Royals gave him a \$560,900 signing bonus. He traded it for the Nissan two weeks before the crash. He used the money to buy drugs.

Barb’s husband and Carter’s stepdad, Michael Rea, told Barb not to go to the scene of the accident the night it happened. She did see pictures of the totaled car and the light pole knocked over when she drove by.

She drives by the scene every day on her way to work.

“There’s not a second that goes by that I don’t think of that crash,” Barb said.

To this day, Carter wonders how he didn’t receive a phone call from a police officer or city official about the



David Samson / The Forum
Fargo-Moorhead RedHawks manager Jim Bennett greets Carter Hope during introductions before play against Milwaukee at Newman Outdoor Field on May 20.

REDHAWKS RALLY TO DEFEAT DOGS

FARGO — Fargo-Moorhead battled back to top Chicago 9-8 Tuesday night in American Association baseball at Newman Outdoor Field before 3,890 fans.

The RedHawks (42-25) trailed 4-0 entering the bottom of the third inning, but answered with three runs in the bottom of the third and five in the bottom of the fifth. Chris Jacobs went 3-for-5 with two runs and two RBIs to lead the RedHawks. Correlle Prime added a pair of hits and two RBIs.

RedHawks relief pitcher Carter Hope tossed two no-hit, shutout innings with two strikeouts.

light pole or the crash. What he did receive was \$10,000 in insurance money for the Nissan. He spent that money on drugs, blowing through it in two weeks.

At 21, Carter was sleeping in trap houses and doing anything necessary to get drugs. He said his flesh craved heroin. He was 175 pounds. Three years previous he was a 6-foot-3, 195-pound high school senior, throwing fastballs in the low 90s.

He’ll never forget sitting in the garage of a family who used to get heroin. One person who would smoke heroin with him would do so with their toddlers on their lap. He still remembers the faces of those young children.

“I never expected I would become who I became,” Carter said. “I grew up in a good family. I knew the difference between right and wrong.”

Carter grew up in a suburb of Tulsa. His house was right up against a water retention pond. His neighbors built a backstop behind the house, along with some benches. Barb would watch from the kitchen window as 15-20 neighborhood boys, including three of her sons, would play baseball as long as sunlight existed.

“Baseball was our life,” Barb said.

Both of Carter’s older brothers were MLB draft picks, as Mason was drafted by the Marlins in 2011 and Garrett, who played football at West Virginia before going back to baseball, is currently in the Dodgers system. Barb still has the shoe boxes with all the letters from MLB teams and colleges for the three.

Carter played catcher and third base through his first three years of high school. The summer before his senior season, Carter decided to try pitching. He had made a visit to Oklahoma State, where his father pitched and Barb received a scholarship for softball, and the OSU pitching coach recommended he try pitching. The calls from MLB teams and colleges began the summer before his senior season.

“His throw from third always came out of his hand really well across the diamond, he had a power arm,” The Woodlands baseball coach Ron Eastman said. “When the scouts start calling then you know a player is having a good summer.”

Carter threw a no-hitter in his first high school game on the mound. He pitched in the state championship game, despite competing with a pitcher committed to Texas Christian University for the No. 1 starting spot. On the

bus ride to the state championship game, he received a phone call from the Royals to say he had been drafted in the third round. Carter expected maybe he’d be taken in the fifth or sixth round, at which case he was going to choose to go to OSU.

Carter smoked marijuana every day, multiple times a day, his senior year of high school, including before and after baseball practice and games. Eastman said he had no idea and Barb didn’t find any drug paraphernalia until he had moved on to OxyContin in 2014.

Carter had good grades and MLB scouts and colleges calling him. He was a third-round MLB draft pick. He was 18 and saw over half a million dollars in his bank account. He saw nothing wrong with what he was doing.

“I put myself in a position that my character was not ready for,” Carter said. “I think receiving that money and becoming a professional baseball player at that part of my life, I don’t think I was ready for that.”

Carter assumes he would’ve been kicked out of OSU within a month of getting there, so deciding to go pro is not something he regrets. He doesn’t regret any part of his story except the people he hurt. The things he did to get drugs or what they did to his body and baseball career is not what he regrets. The fact his mother had to hide things so he wouldn’t pawn them or the fact she said she didn’t sleep for years is what hurts him to this day.

Barb knows how to decipher what drugs someone has taken based

on their pupils. She knew the hole in the screen of his bedroom window was so someone could deliver drugs to him. She knew drugs were put in her mailbox for him to pick up. She knew his rage was not him.

“It was like living in a hurricane,” Barb said. She knows what the term “chasing the dragon” actually looks like when it comes to heroin. She knows that Day 3 is the hardest when someone is trying to quit drugs. One of those Day 3s she had to call the police, while hiding in her car, as Carter pounded on the window. He had told her to take away the keys to his car two days previous, but was screaming for them.

“I’ve learned way too much about drugs,” Barb said. “I’m not a nurse. I don’t want to know this. I don’t need to know this.”

Carter failed his first drug test with the Royals, blaming it on partying for prom. Since he had no way to get drugs on the road, he substituted marijuana for alcohol during the baseball season, as he struggled in rookie ball his first season.

He turned things around on the mound in his second season in rookie ball, sporting a 3.71 earned-run average. When he returned home for the offseason in 2014, he was introduced to OxyContin. He fell in love with it, saying he needed it like people need food. He often substituted it for meals.

Eventually, he found a dealer in Arizona during spring training. Life became a circle of struggles on the mound, failed drug tests and telling the Royals he was going to change. Finally, he had nothing to tell

the Royals in December of 2015. He didn’t think he was going to change. The Royals had tried to surround him with people to help, even sending him to rehab.

“I hurt relationships with family, I didn’t have any friends, I was basically a nuisance to society,” Carter said. “I had no value to anybody. I wasn’t capable of loving anybody or myself.”

At around 3 a.m., on Jan. 1, 2017, a few days after someone close to him overdosed, Carter went into his mom and stepdad’s bedroom. He told them he was ready to change. They told him to go get some sleep. They had heard that before. Carter went to his room, leaned against the wall with his forehead on his knees.

He’s been sober ever since.

“That’s when I came to the end of myself,” Carter said.

For the next few months, his entire focus was on reading the Bible, pitching and working out. The Royals gave him another shot in 2018, and although he was released at the end of spring training this March, he felt it worked out perfectly. He wanted everyone in the Royals organization to see what he had become as a person, not a pitcher.

“They were able to witness the transformation,” Carter said.

Three weeks after he was released by the Royals, the RedHawks called and Carter has been in the bullpen ever since. The Royals told him after his baseball career is over they’d like to talk to him about a job working with young players in their organization.

“If he made the majors, that’d be great, but his life has a greater purpose than baseball,” Barb said. “His story can give hope. It gives me goosebumps. I don’t fear for him anymore by any means. I can sleep now. It’s a very peaceful feeling.”

Carter said he doesn’t want anyone to hear his story and think he’s a hero. He’s far from it.

When Carter started playing baseball, he did it to be with friends and he was good at it. Now he loves baseball because much of it is dealing with failure. He loves the idea of standing on the mound less than 24 hours after a disastrous outing.

He’s still standing after his own disasters.

“I don’t regret anything I’ve been through,” Carter said. “I’m actually thankful for what I’ve went through because it’s given me a new perspective on life. I hope my story can help others.”

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