

Where are they now: Kip Bouknight, Part II

Former South Carolina standout Kip Bouknight has been on the doorstep of Major League Baseball for two years, now he is with the Pittsburgh Pirates and feels this spring training will be the one when his dreams are realized. Bouknight's list of accolades as a Gamecock are too long to name. Most notably, he is a three-time All-SEC performer, a two-time All-American and 2000's Golden Spikes Award recipient. That same year he won five out of six National Player of the Year Awards and was named the SEC's Male Athlete of the Year. His 45 wins in a career tied Jeff Brantley's SEC record. He spent a great deal of time with DP this off-season and talked to us about USC, why he returned for his senior year and professional baseball. Enjoy Bouknight's stories in the conclusion of our two-part interview.

DP-Who has made the greatest impression on you as a person and why? KB-Early on, my parents. Dad was a super role model. Now, my wife is amazing! She is from a divorced home. She really keeps me grounded and is the most influential person in my life. She has put her entire life and career on hold to support me.

DP-Who has made the greatest impression on you as a baseball player and why? KB-Matt Holliday (Colorado Rockies), we are very close friends. He has really persevered and has made the most of his opportunities. He is a super human-being. He was a .260 hitter in the minor leagues but made the most of his time in the Arizona Fall League and when he got his shot as an invitee to spring training. He has every tool and a great work ethic and now he's an All-Star! I was so excited for him when he got the call to the Big Leagues.

DP-Tell people out there what it feels like to sign a professional contract: KB-It's a great feeling but humbling too. I guess I'll look back on that one day as big deal but it's such a business. I'm proudest that I'd graduated from South Carolina when that day came. I am the person I am today because of the college experience. I've seen players blow \$2.2 million in signing bonuses after they sign, I just focused on making myself a better baseball player.

DP-Tell us what you're doing in the off-season: KB-Staying very busy! I always workout in the mornings, usually 8:00 until lunch. After I eat, I run errands and help keep the household going. Four to five nights a week I do lessons from 3:30 to 8:00. I work with kids from all over the state that come to me. I normally take Friday and Sunday off. By the time the season rolls around I am actually worn out!

DP-What is your gameday routine? KB-I used to be a huge routine-oriented guy but in pro ball your travel schedule dictates almost everything. Sometimes a flight has you traveling at 6:30 in the morning so you arrive after lunch, you end up taking a nap before you have to go to the park around 2:30. Sometimes you arrive at 4:00 for a 7:00 game. One time the grounds crew forgot to cover the bullpen mound the night before my start, of course it poured that night! I ended up having to throw my entire pre-game bullpen on the game mound...right in front of the other team! Mentally I was thinking, "Are you kidding me?" Routines now require constant adjustments. Ideally for a 7:00 game I'll go to sleep at 11:00 or so the night before and wake up at 7 or 8:00 to eat breakfast. I like to stay busy, some pitchers like to sleep all day or play video games. If I'm at home I'll go to the mall with my wife and have lunch between noon and 1:00. In college I'd eat every Friday at Lizard's Thicket with my mom or my then-girlfriend who is presently my wife. Around 4 or 5:00 I'll eat a peanut butter or turkey sandwich, I prefer, peanut butter. A lot of guys just grab a cheeseburger from McDonald's on the way to the park. An hour before the game I'll shower and begin to get my thoughts together. If I need to I'll stop by the training room. At 35 minutes before the game, I get a good stretch from the trainer. Then I jog to the centerfield fence or run a couple of poles, depending on how hot it is. I always run a couple of sprints because we have to hit and run the bases too. For a home game, 25-28 before the first pitch I'll start playing catch with my catcher. About the 15-minute mark I am on the mound in the bullpen making pitches. I focus on locating the fastball down first and go from there. I never evaluate my bullpen, I leave it there. If the curveball is no good, it's no good. I always tell people to take what's best and run with it. Your catcher will tell you what's good that day, the hitters will tell you too! At 5-6 minutes before gametime I shut it down in the pen and get a sip of water, go to the bathroom, whatever...

DP-What do you have to do to pitch in the Major Leagues? KB-Make the most of an opportunity and I've got one now. I went 14-7, made the All-Star team and got overlooked with the Rockies. I just need somebody in my corner. I can do a lot of things, I even stole a base this year! If Coach Tanner was in the Big Leagues, I'd be a Big Leaguer, he knows I can win. I don't see myself as a frontline starter but I think I can be a fourth or fifth starter for somebody and eat up 180-200 innings a year.

DP-Where do you see yourself in April? KB-My dream says Pittsburgh, people have made the club with a Spring Training invite before. I know I have to pitch lights-out and some injuries have to occur for me to get a shot, I don't wish any bad luck on anybody but I really have a good feeling about this year! I'd hope that the worst-case scenario would be landing in Triple-A Indianapolis. But I guess I could be in Double-A or released too, you just never know.

DP-What is the biggest crowd you've ever performed in front of and where? KB-It was in the Venezuelan All-Star Game. About 30,000-35,000 people were there for Andres Galarraga Night. I was the starting pitcher that night and he came in to see me before the game. He was huge and his head looked like a size 9! He came up and said, "You're the pitcher tonight?" I nodded and he told me I had to groove him fastball's because it was his night. Before I knew it, Tomas Perez and Magglio Ordonez were asking for fastball's too since it was an exhibition game. Now here I am trying to prove something and make a name for myself, everybody already knew them! Well, Galarraga was batting fourth and I was only throwing one inning so I knew I might not face him...but I did. He came up with Endy Chavez at third and two outs. When he got to the plate he was given a standing ovation and he tipped his cap. It probably only lasted 20 seconds but it seemed like 20 minutes. He looked out at me and I gave him the fastball sign with my glove. We both cracked up and I had to leave the rubber to regain my composure. I decided I was going to throw him fastball's but I was going to throw them as hard as possible. The count ran to 2-2 and I threw one last fastball down the pipe and he swung threw it. You could have heard a pin drop and I was scared for my life! There were fights throughout the night and I just knew I was about to get shot! In the third inning he doubled down the left field line and was approached at second base by a half-naked blond lady and he gave her his jersey. In the fourth inning they brought a podium out and he addressed the crowd. I was really glad he got that double in the third inning. After the game I found out that the 2-2 fastball was 92 MPH. In fact, I did not throw him a fastball under 90...that's only a big deal because I normally pitch at 86-88. I was so pumped up!

DP-What MLB feat in history do you wish

you'd been inside the stadium to witness and why?KB-I would have liked to see Babe Ruth play or seen Hank Aaron's #715. DP-Do you have a clean locker room or road trip story you can share with us?KB-In college, on Sunday's we'd usually jump on the bus after games and eat pizza so we could get on the road. We'd normally split a large pizza between two players. Coach Toman would walk through the bus and accuse players of "stealing pies." It was normally directed at players who didn't play or didn't play well, he'd go up and tell them they were stealing pies. Then he'd come to me and say, "Bouknight, you haven't done anything since Friday, you're stealing pies too!" DP-Who is your favorite athlete outside of baseball?KB-Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods. I have not watched an NBA game since Jordan retired and if Tiger is leading by five strokes, he wants to win by 15. DP-Who is your favorite MLB pitcher and position player to watch and why?KB-Greg Maddux, it's amazing what he can do with a ball and he fields his position well too. Gary Sheffield, it's amazing to see him swing a bat, he really has great hands. DP-Who is was your favorite MLB team growing up?KB-Braves DP-Who was your boyhood idol and why?KB-Don Mattingly DP-What is your favorite sport to play other than baseball?KB-Golf DP-What is your favorite sport to watch other than baseball?KB-Golf DP-What are some of your hobbies?KB-Golf, fantasy football DP-What is something people don't know about you?KB-I love to play X-Box 360 DP-What goals do you have for yourself in and out of baseball?KB-I want to get to the Big Leagues and continue to develop consistency. I want to develop consistency as a person too. Sometimes I allow myself to be too vulnerable to people but I like to do good things for people. I like for people to know me and respect who I am as a person. I want to be a good influence. DP-Where do you see yourself in 10 years? KB-Pitching in the Major Leagues I hope. I'm not a power pitcher so I should be smarter and better by then, many pitchers don't reach their prime until they're around 32. If not, I'll be playing lots of golf. I'd like to coach, probably at the college level, definitely not in the minor leagues. DP-Give a high school player who is reading this article one piece of advice.KB-If you want something, go get it but understand it will take a lot of hard work. Make the most of what you have. Who knows what your potential is but try to find out. I have always done everything I can possibly do to get where I want to go, you don't want regrets. Remember, you only get one shot at this game. DP-We really appreciate your time, I know your answers will remind a lot of Gamecock fans of some good memories. Your insight will also help a lot of young players. Thank you! Note: If interested in pitching lessons with Kip Bouknight, email him at: kipb14@yahoo.com..To view Part I of this interview, [click here](#).