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## Preview: Sweet redemption

**KENDALL ROGERS**

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Stanford left-handed pitcher Brett Mooneyham knows how to overcome even the most serious challenges in life, and it's something that has helped him get off to a great start this spring.

Well before his college days, when he was 12-years-old, Mooneyham barely escaped death in a serious car accident, where his vehicle rolled over three times. Amazingly, Mooneyham left the scene of the wreck with just a head injury that required 250 stitches, and some burns above his left arm. In his words, he had no broken bones and things turned out all right.

After going through a situation like that as a youngster, it's safe to say Mooneyham was prepared for any challenge thrown his way. Mooneyham was faced with another stiff test before his junior campaign in 2011, when he suffered a sliced finger that evolved into a ruptured finger.

As he prepared for his junior campaign -- an important draft year -- on the mound, Mooneyham had high hopes for the '11 season. He felt his command and control had made some strides the second half of his sophomore season. But in an instant, again, it seemed like his life, particularly on the baseball diamond, was turned upside down.

Mooneyham's prognosis wasn't good. He needed surgery and would at least be out of commission until May. He and the Cardinal decided on a redshirt season, meaning he was out for the year in the most important campaign of his collegiate career.

"I learned last year that you can't really take anything for granted in this game. It was tough. It sucked," he said. "To not play, it was a tough pill to swallow. But I got stronger from it. The injury really motivated me to get myself in the best position possible during the offseason."

Mooneyham set some goals as the offseason progressed. He wanted to be keyed in to everything in every phase of the game, and he wanted to correct all the issues people criticized him about in the past, particularly his lack of consistency and command.

Before 2012, Mooneyham had issues establishing consistency. As a freshman in 2009, he had a respectable 4.14 ERA in 67 1/3 innings of work. But he also had 72 strikeouts and a high total of 54 walks. Then, as a sophomore, the lefty had a .507 ERA in 87 1/3 innings pitched. And again, walks were an issue, finishing the campaign with 99 strikeouts and 62 walks.

Despite some rough overall numbers, it was during his sophomore campaign that pitching coach Rusty Filter, who was then in his first year after helping guide San Diego State's Stephen Strasburg to stardom, began to realize Mooneyham was making significant progress.

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just a .139 clip.

"We don't throw a curveball anymore, it's more a slider. It's kind of like a hybrid that's a combination of both pitches," Filter said. "He's got the ability with the fastball, especially when he keeps it down in the zone. He has the confidence to throw all his pitches for strikes."

Some offseason mechanical changes have helped Mooneyham take a huge step forward. The lefty is doing a better job of keeping his front side closed and his front arm more extended.

Those changes have led to better command and more positive repetition with his pitches.

"I give Coach Filter a lot of credit for me turning things around. We worked on a lot of these mechanical things in the fall, and they've worked," he said. "Those changes really have helped me out with my control and the ability to put the ball where I want it."

Should Mooneyham continue at the current pace, his stock both on the collegiate level and as a draft prospect, will only rise. He entered the spring as the No. 18 prospect in the Pac-12 Conference, but that surely will improve with a continued strong redshirt junior campaign.

Just two seasons ago, many had already chalked up Mooneyham as a bust. But now, even after an injury that sidelined him for a season, the left-hander has made significant strides and is pitching as good as anyone in college baseball. He has helped the No. 2 Cardinal race off to an impressive 11-1 start entering this weekend's series against Rice.

Mooneyham and Filter agree there's still work to be done, but much progress has been made.



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