

the sporting life

Go Falcons.

A Life in Baseball...

and Cricket?

How Mike Young, '79, parlayed his college baseball play into an international sports career.

by Jim Thies

Mike Young has traveled the world. Today he's earned an international reputation as a successful coach and manager. But he got off to a bumpy start.

Following his freshman year with the Falcon baseball team in 1975, Young found his future with the squad in doubt.

"Don Joseph was the baseball coach. He made it tough for me," remembers Young. "He told me, in a team meeting after my freshman year, that he didn't want me on the team. I waited to talk to him after the meeting, and I was embarrassed. I told him that there was no way he was going to keep me off the team and that when I tried out the following year I was going to be the best player at tryouts. He woke me up. I was pretty arrogant at that time, and I took it as a challenge to be better. Had he not done that, I would not have learned things about growing up. He was tough, but it worked."

According to Young, UW-RF changed his life. "Tony DeStephano and I grew up in Chicago and came to UW-RF together. Let's just say that we didn't have halos over our heads. Without what I learned about life at UW-RF I probably would have gone to jail. The years I spent there helped turned my life around—people took the time and showed me what was important in life."

Young listened and learned. He made those significant life decisions that helped him become a four-year starter and

the team's captain and Most Valuable Player in 1978.

Through Bob Bailey he developed an interest in international travel. "Professor Bailey helped me a lot with my first international experience," says Young. "I spent a lot of time with him, and he had an impact on me."

By the time he graduated from UW-RF, he had landed a playing contract in Holland. "One of my teammates with the Falcons—Rob Bohn—had a contract to play in Holland," recalls Young. "But at the last minute he had to pull out and asked me if I wanted to take his place."

Young played two seasons in Holland. While there, he learned that other countries were looking for players, so he sent out his resume. In 1981 an Australian team contacted him and Young played and coached there for two years with the Queensland Rams, which won the Claxton Shield, the Australian National Championship.

Over the next several years he managed teams in both the United States and Australia, made possible because Australian baseball seasons run from September through April while the seasons in the United States go from April through October.

In 1985 he got his first chance to manage in the professional ranks with Major League Baseball. He led the Medicine Hat Blue Jays, a rookie league affiliate for the Toronto Blue Jays; then managed the Bluefield Orioles

(1989), a rookie league affiliate for the Baltimore Orioles; moved on to the Wausau Timbers (1990), an "A" affiliate for the Orioles; and then coached third base for the Rochester Red Wings (1991-92), a "AAA" affiliate for the Orioles. In 1993 and 1994 he managed two teams in "A" ball for the Cleveland Indians. The 1994 team won the South Atlantic League championship with an 87-53 record.

Meanwhile, back in Australia, Young was becoming a major force in that country's baseball establishment. In 1987-88 he managed the Australian team that played in the Seoul Olympics. "That was a phenomenal experience," says Young. "We beat Canada in our first game and finished fifth overall. It was the best finish by an Australian team in the games up until that time."

Twice he has been named the International Baseball Association Coach of the Year—in 1997 and again in 1999. No other person in the world has won the award twice. Both of those years he was the manager of the Australian Olympic team. The 1997 team won a bronze medal at the Intercontinental Cup competition played in Barcelona, Spain. That team traveled to Florida for training purposes and defeated the United States team in the medal round at the Intercontinental Cup. The bronze medal was the first medal ever won by Australia at a senior level. Young coached Jeff Williams with the team, and Williams went on to a career in Major League Baseball.

In 1999 he again was the manager of the Australian National team that won the Intercontinental Cup Gold Medal. The games were played in Sydney and had players like Grant Balfour, Shayne Bennett, Cameron Cairncross, David Nilsson and Chris Snelling. All played in the Majors. That team also won the gold medal in the Taiwan International Tourney against teams from Korea and Chinese Taipei.

While baseball has been Young's main sport, recently he has been asked to help coach cricket. Since 2000 he has been a throwing and fielding coach with the Australian professional cricket team.

"Living in Crabtree Hall I heard crickets," Young quips. "But when I went to Australia I didn't know the sport existed." Now Young appreciates the opportunity to help people in another sport. "What I teach in cricket is exactly the same as in baseball as far as fielding and throwing are concerned," explains Young. "The ball is about the same size but harder. The hand-eye ball skills are alike. It's been a real positive sport to be involved with and it is very popular. The players are tremendous athletes," says Young.

His international travels have given him some thoughts on life in other countries. Young says: "What I thought was a big deal—language, driving on the other side of the road—you learn to accept as real positives. There are some great things in the world. The reality is that the United States is not perfect. I've learned that we are a bit insular—we know about our own country. But we need to know what's going on in other countries. I've spent 24 years in Australia and it is phenomenal. I've been very fortunate to

have lived there. But at the same time, I feel blessed that I'm back in the United States."

He is currently managing the Rockford, Ill., Riverhawks, an independent team in the Frontier League. He will work there through September and return to Australia in early October. He hopes to return to the U.S. again next year to manage.

If you'd like to contact Young, send him an e-mail at mry1221@hotmail.com. ■

Caught On Film



Attention UW-RF football alumni and fans. Assistant football coach Harold Tiffany needs to hear from you. He's discovered in the University Archives a treasure trove of old game films, the oldest being a contest with St. Cloud from 1952. There's a game against La Crosse from 1953, one taking on Superior from 1955, a Stevens Point game from 1956, a few contests from 1957, and progressively more games per season from the late '50s through the '60s. After 1970 all game films are available. Videotaping of all games arrived in the 1980s. The issue for Tiffany and UW-RF is encompassed in the words old and film. Because film deteriorates with age, the university is in danger of losing this important historical record. And the cost for conversion to DVD is considerable. But, figures Tiffany, if there's enough interest out there from former players (and life-long Falcon Football fans) to purchase DVD copies of the games, the film recovery project could go forward.

Do you have a favorite game that you played in? Are you aware of a significant victory (or defeat) that shouldn't be lost for all time? Would you be willing to purchase a personal copy of that game in which you scored the winning touchdown or made that game-saving tackle? Would you and your teammates want to make a donation to the recovery project? Contact Tiffany with your inquiries and support by calling the Football Office at 425-3135; or send us an e-mail at falconfeatures@uwrf.edu. Help us preserve this action-packed portion of UW-RF's history.