

Charleston's James Naile

Pitched Championship Game

Naile's path to the majors goes thru Oakland

While being from a small town certainly has its advantages, **Charleston's James Naile** is taking his game to the big time. Hopefully, the [Oakland A's](#) will take note of his stellar 2016 season and the former Blue Jay will be in the Big Leagues soon.

What James has been - during his time as a player and student at **CHS and UAB** - is be a role model; a natural leader. He helped lead the **Blue Jays** to their state championship bid five years ago. This year, Naile was on the mound for the [Midland Rockhounds](#) when they cinched the Texas League Championship.

This down to earth, wholesome young lad agreed to partake in the **#Kron's #7Q's** while he enjoys the home cooking of his family and a break from the hectic pace of minor league baseball.

Here is the exchange.

#1 - Can you put into words this year; the championship finish?

This year has been a dream come true. Being my first full year I didn't quite know what to expect. I went into spring training strong and ready, and quickly found out that seven or eight straight months of baseball was going to be tougher than I imagined. I pitched well and pretty consistently most all of the year, even while getting bumped around between the levels. The organization gave me several opportunities to pitch in the higher levels which is something I am very grateful for. This gave me a tremendous amount of confidence and also so much knowledge from playing with and under so many great players and coaches. I took what I learned and tried to just put it to use the best I could. Ended up with a strong finish down the stretch, got promoted from High A Stockton, CA to Double A Midland, TX and joined in with a phenomenal coaching staff and group of guys. Turns out we were jumping right into a playoff push where we were going to need everyone. So, I was right in the mix waiting to pitch, getting my chance on Game 4 of the championship series. Went out and just tried to compete, fortunately had some great defense and we put together a great game overall and took home a championship for the third straight year which is pretty incredible in itself. Very fortunate for that opportunity and couldn't be prouder to have been able to do my part.

#2 - Are the bus rides in the minors what they crack them up to be?

. Good question. The bus rides in the minors are pretty much as bad as they sound. They are even harder for those of us who are not blessed with the ability to sleep in vehicles. So, they sure do make for some long nights cramped up. But, they are part of the job so you take the good with the bad. It's always funny because I have some great memories from even the worst bus rides. Everyone on the team including coaches are in them together. You try and make the best of them! Hop on the bus and drive all night long to get to a hotel and catch a quick nap before the field. That's a routine part of the business, wish I could say you get used to it! But, I wouldn't trade them for anything.

#3 - Do they feel similar to the ones from CHS to Delta; or Ep?

They are a little different than taking the old yellow bus from CHS to neighboring towns! I am sure at one point I got tired of traveling 45 minutes tops to play, and now it's nothing go seven to twelve hours and get off and roll. But, like I said, it's a lot of fun sometimes and part of the job, so you just have to hang in there. I'm convinced there are days and weeks where I'm running on coffee!

#4 How much of an impact was Coach Minner?

Coach Minner has been a rock through all of this. Actually the entire Minner family has been just incredible throughout this process, both with pro ball and college. I know Michael has my back, and is supportive of me whether or not I ever play another game in my life. He taught me more than he even realizes, and more importantly he got me prepared to go out into the world. He is as most know a little in your face at times, and that is exactly what I and other kids need at that age. Because, when players get to college and/or out into the real

world they are going to run into tough people. People that push them, and make their world uncomfortable. In Minner's case he pushed me, in the best way possible, and never let me settle from a weak little freshman at CHS to maturing heavily throughout high school. He's constantly supported me throughout everything, and I am lucky to know him, played under him, and now call him a friend. He's still one of the first people I hit up when I come to town.

#5 What is the outlook for 2017

The outlook for 2017 is very positive. I am happy to be home now and resting, but soon enough the strength phase will kick in, which will be huge for me. I plan on going back down to Birmingham for most of the offseason and training. I hope to continue to gain strength and weight, get up over 200lbs for the start of spring training. Then, go into spring training healthy. If I can do those things, I will be in a good situation to build off this past year. I don't know where I'll start, that's completely out of my control. However, I can go in there a little stronger, healthier, and better, and see where I land. I hope to just have another consistent year, continue to develop arm strength and velocity, getting more consistent with my offspeed, and working on that 4th pitch (cut fastball). If I can do those couple of goals, I'll be in good shape.

#6 What would you tell young athletes would be the number one thing to get them the opportunity to play college ball?

Young athletes should focus on grades, athleticism, and stay out of off field issues. I'm a believer that anyone can play college baseball if they set their mind to it. There are colleges for every skill level, if that person is willing to put in the work to get there. Building athleticism is tough, I'm not saying play every sport, I'm not saying stick to one sport either, but always working out, and being active will increase your chances. You can't really teach athleticism, so college coaches are always looking for that in players. Keep your head on straight, do you school work, which will ultimately help you out with scholarship money, etc. and make yourself an asset to a college program. Someone that has terrible social media habits, and has been in trouble throughout their high school life is going to be someone that has trouble finding a college program that will put up with them. That is just a fact. Colleges can simply find someone that may not be as valuable off the field, but at least they are reliable. So, if I had to tell young kids something I would say make yourself reliable, and trustworthy. They can put you in a game and you perform, and they don't have to worry about you being eligible either.

#7 - How gratifying is the familial experience to be able to enjoy this with your brother and mother and father; grandparents; the whole town of Charleston and SEMO beyond?

This a question I get asked quite a bit. And it's truly tough to answer because I can't really even put into words how incredible and fortunate I am to have the support and following I do. Starting with my family, my parents are truly the best. I play with a lot of players and a long way from home, and I see my parents as much as anyone. They don't miss a game. They travel, they tune in on computers and radio, they are the best parents you could ask for. I am fortunate to have them. My brother is also great to share this with because he is someone who I can relate best with. Obviously we are close and talk quite a bit. But, I just know he's always there for me. He is always supporting me, and I don't take that for granted. He too pushes me, and makes me a better person and I owe him everything for helping me live out my dream. My grandparents are such a blessing. I'm so fortunate to have both sets and know them all well. They help me out too, more than they even realize. They always there for me, they give me great advice. I don't tell them enough how appreciative I am of their support. Their wisdom always helps me in times when I am questioning things. I am truly thankful for them. The town of Charleston has been remarkable because it's hard to find a town get behind someone like they have. I am grateful for each and every person, whether it be comments on Facebook, or text messages, or people tuning in on their own to listen on nights I'm pitching. It's truly awesome, and humbling. It kind of keeps me going when times seem a little tough. I know I've got so many people back home that I owe it to give this thing all that I have. I am proud to be from a small town in Missouri, with the best family and friends and support system out of anyone I know.

Final follow up : Many speak of your positive role model behavior, how big a part does your faith play in this?

I think that its important for me to be role model. I know that I looked up and still do to people like Blake Dewitt. Blake did everything the right way. I admire that. I knew if I got an opportunity I wanted people to look at me and think James does the right thing, and has stayed true to his roots. You know? Faith has played a huge roll in this. Many people don't know but UAB really changed my life. Obviously they helped me in baseball and led to this career after three years under Brian Shoop, Josh Hopper, Perry Roth, and Ron Polk. But, more importantly they turned me into what I want to be and that is a Godly man. I'm not there yet, but I aspire to be half the men they are. That is a God First program. UAB Baseball taught me how to live life the right way, honoring Christ. I still fail every day, but I know that it's more than actions. They taught me that. And now, I am truly happy that I can use my platform as an athlete to speak out for Christ. Let other people and players know baseball is what I do, not who I am. I don't do it enough truly. But faith is so important to me, it keeps me grounded, and gives me better way to live my life.

James Naile is resting and relaxing this off-season at home with his parents in Charleston, Mo.

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