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RCBL Injury Slowed Pitcher

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BRIDGEWATER - During Robert Gallet's sophomore year at North Stafford High School, his coach told him to calm down on the mound, sensing that the right-hander was rushing his mechanics - so Gallet went to an unconventional delivery, bringing his hands above his head, and his windup now resembles that of Hall of Famer Greg Maddux's. But the **Bridgewater** College senior's free-and-easy mechanics almost came to a halt last summer while he was playing for the **Bridgewater** Reds in the Rockingham County Baseball League.

"I just saw the facial expression and I knew something wasn't right," former Reds manager Charlie Shepard said. "It was that startled look, and that look means something. You go straight to your worst thought."

Pitching in Game 1 of the RCBL playoffs against the Elkton Blue Sox, Gallet felt a pop in his right pitching elbow during the fourth inning. He immediately took himself out of the game and was shut down for the rest of the summer season.

"It just had a little pop, and I was like, 'That didn't feel right,'" said Gallet (rhymes with Gillette), who pitched BC to a 6-0 win over Mary Washington on Thursday.

He was right. After calling his high school coach, who suffered a similar injury, Gallet knew the severity was not as bad as it could have been. He could still lift his arm and turn a doorknob, exercises that test the elbow's strength.

So Gallet rested his arm for the next several months, only throwing casually. During a trip to Lake Anna two months later, he said he attempted to skip a rock on the water, and the underhand motion revealed the pain was still there. He went to Rockingham Memorial Hospital with BC trainer Scott Powers to get an MRI, which showed an "under-tear" of his ulnar collateral ligament, a small but serious injury similar to what New York Mets ace Matt Harvey suffered last season.

BC put Gallet on a weightlifting regimen over the winter, helping him build the muscles in his forearm and triceps, areas of stress when pitching.

So far, it has worked, albeit in a different role than Gallet has had in the past. This season, he's made seven appearances and just three starts, including the eight-inning, seven-strikeout win Thursday.

"I wanted to be able to see him pitch his senior year, so we took it slow," BC coach Curt Kendall said. "He felt good when we started the season, but we took it slow. Now he's starting to get into normal starter-type numbers."

Gallet's injury came after a full season at **Bridgewater** (71 1/3 innings, second-most at BC) and a heavy workload for the Reds in the summer (65 2/3 innings, third-most in the RCBL).

Gallet carried the **Bridgewater** Reds' staff. He threw four complete games and at least seven innings seven times, including an 11-inning, 127-pitch outing against Luray on July 23. In his seven regular-season starts, he averaged 126 pitches per start.

"We monitored his innings very well and he threw some complete games," said Shepard, now the manager of the Broadway Bruins. "He threw some complete games. It's an injury, but there's nothing you can do to prevent it. He may pitch another 20 years and it may never happen again."

Gallet admits that he's smarter now when it comes to rest and recovery, but he doesn't regret pitching the innings that possibly caused his injury.

"I love throwing, so even [at BC] if I can go throw I do," Gallet said. "I did throw a lot of innings in the RCBL, but it was just an over-time sort of thing and the RCBL was kind of what did it."

"... I felt like I was superhuman doing it at the time, but I'm a little bit smarter now."

The Eagles (17-7 overall, 7-3 in the Old Dominion Athletic Conference) were able to withstand an injury to Gallet - a first-team All-ODAC pitcher last year - because of an extremely deep and veteran staff. BC's team earned run average is 2.97, second behind only Washington & Lee (2.32) in the 11-team ODAC.

"[Pitching] has been our mainstay," Kendall said.

BC's bullpen - a mix-and-match array of different arms - is potentially the best in the league. The Eagles have five pitchers with at least one save and three with two saves for a total of eight, including junior Corey Armentrout and senior Kyle Henshaw who are No. 1 and No. 2 on the team in wins. Gallet also has one save.

Kendall said Gallet had the hardest time at first throwing out of the bullpen, mainly because he had never done anything else.

But BC kept a close eye on Gallet's innings before stretching him back into a starter only recently.

The lack of innings (he's thrown only 29 1/3 innings after going over 70 as a sophomore and junior) doesn't bother Gallet.

"I'm kind of happy with my role, because if I had to be the only ace or the only starter, that would be bad," Gallet said. "I kind of like that we have five starters, because that's going to help come tournament time. I will sit as long as we get wins."

And win the Eagles have done. BC's victory Thursday was its sixth straight as it enters a stretch of 15 games in 29 days to end the season. **Bridgewater** sits behind Shenandoah (20-5, 10-2) for second-place in the ODAC.

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