

Simpson Lays Groundwork For Pro Career

Dave Brown
reporter

Most baseball fans have fantasized about coming out of the bullpen in the bottom of the ninth inning to shut down the opposing team, but that fantasy is often a reality if you are Bob Simpson of the UMSL baseball team.

Last season the 6-foot-1, 180-pound, pitcher tied an UMSL school record by recording seven saves. He also had a 3-2 record and a team leading 4.78 earned run average. Prior to the final tournament of last season, his earned run average had hovered around the 1.52 mark. For his efforts, Simpson was named to the All-conference team.

Simpson, a junior, has not always been a relief pitcher. As a freshman at Francis Howell High School, he was originally a catcher, but soon began pitching on the junior varsity squad. During his junior year, Simpson became a starting pitcher on the varsity squad. At the same time he was gaining experience as a reliever on the C & H American Legion team. In 1983, C & H won the state tournament, and Simpson picked up both saves in the best-of-three championship series.

Although he was just an average high school pitcher, Simpson was good enough to play for Maryville College his freshman year. "I didn't win any awards in high school, but when I went to Maryville I gained about 30 pounds and that really

helped me," Simpson said.

It must have because he had a very successful freshman season. He posted a 5-3 record and recorded the most starts and wins ever by a freshman at Maryville. Simpson then transferred to UMSL for his sophomore year.

Many people stereotype relievers as big, tall, strong players who come into the game and throw smoke for two or three innings such as Goose Gossage or the Cardinals' Todd Worrell, but Bob Simpson does not fit into that mold. Simpson's curveball is his main weapon.

"The neat thing about relieving is that you only see each batter once," he said. "Then they're not used to seeing that big curveball. I throw the curveball 80 percent of the time. Most people don't see a curveball that breaks as much as mine."

In a game against Southwest Missouri State, Simpson recalls throwing 15 straight curveballs.

Simpson added that he also likes to throw an overhead curve and the slurve. According to Simpson, his slurve is like a slow slider.

Along with his curveball, Simpson sees his intelligence as a ballplayer as one of the reasons for his success. "I can handle clutch situations," he said. "I really pull through in the tough ones."

Almost all pitchers have at least one weakness, Simpson sees his as being the fastball. It's been clocked at 81 miles per hour, but he would

like to get it up to at least 85 mph. "I'd also like it to have some more movement," he added.

Like most college baseball players, Simpson spends most of the year playing the game. Following the college season, he spends the summer pitching for the Pointers of the CYC Major League. Then the college fall season runs from late August through October. Over the winter, Simpson follows his own conditioning program.

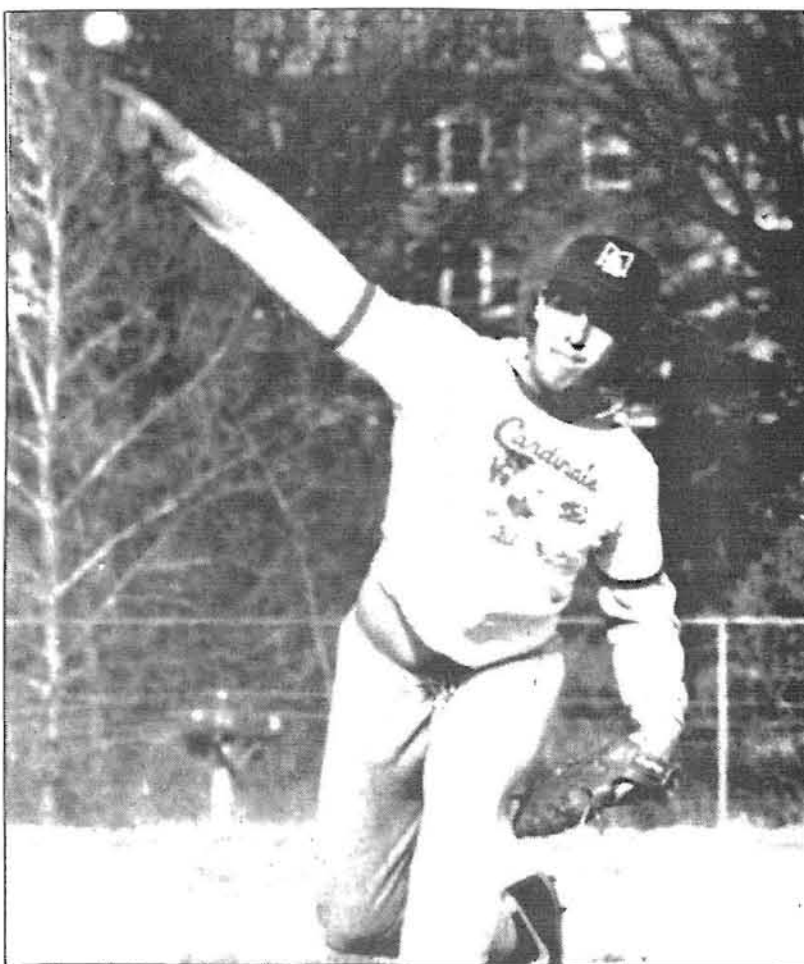
Like any kid who ever wore a cap and glove, Bob Simpson hopes to someday play professional baseball, but he knows he will have to take some definite steps to reach that goal. First, he would like to break the saves record which he tied last year.

"Once you've tied a record, you really feel that you want to break it," Simpson said. He feels that it will be more difficult this year because of the quality pitching staff.

His second goal will be to make the all-conference team again this year, which should help him be named as an All-American. This would help catch the eye of major league scouts.

Finally he wants to improve his fastball. To receive a good look from the scouts, one needs at least an 85 mph fastball, he said.

For Bob Simpson, the long road to achieve his goals begins this week as the UMSL baseball season gets under way.



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Rivermen

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On the subject of pitching, Brady's only skeptical thoughts concerning the Rivermen, he said, "It comes down to how much heart they've got. If we get them six, seven runs, they should be enough to win. They'll just have to learn from their experience."

If not, it's going to be a long season.

This week UMSL had its home opener against Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. The Rivermen are in action against Northwest Missouri State University at 1:30 at the UMSL Field. Saturday UMSL will travel to Rolla to take on the Miners.

Berres

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successful coaching experience.

Smith added that applicants must have "A commitment to the growth and development of women's athletics."

"It's time for someone young and eager to do something with the program," Berres said.

There aren't any favorites yet among possible candidates. Smith says. But if current athletics hiring trends continue, the new assistant athletic director/volleyball coach will be someone with a local sports background, if not direct ties with UMSL sports programs.

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