

Under Armour Game Steps Up

Wrigley Field location helps game attract talent

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By Matt Blood

CHICAGO—With the help of a top-tier sponsor and access to a major league stadium, Baseball Factory kicked off its inaugural Under Armour All-American Game at Wrigley Field Sunday afternoon. Formerly titled as the Cape Cod Classic and held in Wareham, Mass., Sunday's game in Chicago was a huge step-up in terms of hype, publicity and national television exposure (ESPNU carried the game live) for the Baseball Factory. The event was an All-American Game and boasted 36 of the nation's best high school baseball players, but did so in a way consistent with the Baseball Factory philosophy of player development.

The teams' rosters included well-known standouts from this summer's showcase circuit and also new players who have not been as visible but have shown elite-level skills in a Baseball Factory team tryout, workout or tournament.

"I have to give our scouts at Baseball Factory a lot of credit when it comes to the quality of players they chose to participate in this game," Baseball Factory CEO Steve Sclafani said. "They stuck their neck out on several players and these players did not disappoint."

The players were impressive and the drama in the contest was exciting as well. Sunday's game included 36 total strikeouts but also 18 hits and nine total runs. The final score was 5-4 with the team representing Baseball Factory defeating Team One, as the last out came when Canadian lefthander Jake Eliopoulos struck out the nation's top position player, Georgia prep outfielder Donovan Tate, on a backdoor breaking ball.



Mychal Givens
Baseball Factory MVP
Under Armour All-America Game

At the game's end, a player from each squad was named MVP for his accomplishments on the day. Mychal Givens won the award for Baseball Factory as he tallied two hits offensively and struck out two batters while pitching.

"It is a great honor to win the award, especially playing in Wrigley Field against the best 36 players in the country," Givens said. "It was a great way to end the summer."

David Renfroe was honored from Team One as he struck out five batters in two innings of work and also hit the game's lone home run, a three-run shot off Eliopoulos in the eighth.

"It's hard to say which was more fun, the strikeouts or hitting the home run," Renfroe said. "I enjoyed both."

Most of these players have been playing baseball since February, when their high school seasons began, and through the summer in various tournaments and showcase events. Even amongst all the strikeouts, the fatigue from seven months of baseball was noticeable, especially in the velocities on the mound. On average, most of the pitchers Sunday flashed velocities at least two mph lower than their typical radar gun readings. For example, righthander Jacob Turner started the game for Team One and broke 90 mph once in his inning on the mound. His fastball, consistently in the low-90s and up to 94 mph throughout the summer, sat between 88-89 mph on Sunday. Lefthander Matthew Purke started the game for Baseball Factory and seemed to be feeling the same effects as his fastball read 88-90 mph on the radar gun, when only a week earlier he too was in the low-90s and up to 95 mph.

The highest velocity reading on the day came from Givens when he hit 96 mph with his fifth pitch of the day. Givens faced three hitters and sat between 93-94 mph with his fastball to the first two. However, by the third batter, Givens' fastball dropped to 91 mph and even touched 88 mph twice.

The Under Armour All-American Game marks the conclusion of the summer showcase circuit as high schools across the country begin classes in August. The next major event will take place in late October at the World Wood Bat Showcase in Jupiter, Fla.

Six players that impressed at the Under Armour All-American Game

Max Stassi, c. Yuba City (Calif.) HS

Stassi began the summer as a highly ranked prospect after standout performances at the PG National Showcase and USA Baseball's Tournament of Stars. However, Stassi slipped into a slump at the plate while competing with the 18-and-under national team in Edmonton. A team leader and tremendous defensive catcher, Stassi also prides himself on his offensive ability.

"Coming in to this game, I was on a mission," Stassi said. "I didn't show the type of player that I am when I was with Team USA, and I knew this was the last event of the summer. I felt like I needed to step it up and show the real player that I am."

Stassi did just that, belting three hits and making solid contact in all four of his at-bats on Sunday. What was even more impressive was Stassi's consistent professional approach to the game. During batting practice, Stassi was working on driving balls to the opposite field. His strategy paid off during the game as in his last at-bat, Stassi drove a double into the ivy on the right-center field wall. Listed at 5-feet-10, 185 pounds, Stassi is the type of player that is typically undervalued on first glimpse but when evaluated regularly, displays all the professional characteristics and tools scouts desire in a catcher.

Deven Marrero, ss. American Heritage HS, Davie, Fla.

Marrero is coming of a high school season of winning not only a state championship but also a national championship with American Heritage. The teammate of first-rounder Eric Hosmer and three other draft picks in 2008, Marrero is used to playing with high caliber players, and his demeanor and performance during the Under Armour All-American Game weekend proved it. Marrero was the best defensive shortstop in attendance, making every play look routine and flashing his above-average arm strength. Offense is the area that scouts have had concerns with Marrero, but during the game on Sunday, Marrero produced four quality at-bats. His final line on the day was 1-for-3 with a walk. Marrero has a good chance to be the top prep shortstop selected in the 2009 draft.

Jonathan Walsh, c. Coppell (Texas) HS

Walsh may have improved his draft stock as much as anyone in the last two weeks of the showcase circuit. He put together impressive performances at the Area Code Games, Aflac All-American Game and Under Armour Classic. Listed at 6-foot-3, 220 pounds, Walsh is a strong, physical catcher also blessed with athleticism. A switch-hitter, Walsh has power from both sides of the plate and also runs well, posting 60-yard dash times between 6.6 and 6.8 seconds. Defensively, he may need some work behind the plate, but will at least be given a chance to stay there due to his pure athleticism. During the game, Walsh was 1-for-3 with a walk and was also hit by a pitch.

Madison Younginer, rhp. Mauldin HS, Simpsonville, S.C.

Younginer missed the East Coast Professional Showcase to participate in the Big League World Series, helping lead his team to the world title held in early August in Easley, S.C. He also was passed up by the 18U national team and the Aflac All-American game rosters. However, Younginer was in Chicago and produced one of the best performances of any pitcher on Sunday, retiring the three batters he faced in 14 total pitches, striking out two. Younginer is a 6-feet-4, 190-pound righthander with a clean arm and projection. His fastball sat between 91-92 mph, complemented by a sharp mid-70s curveball.



David Renfro
Team One MVP
Under Armour All-America Game

David Renfro, rhp/ss. South Panola HS, Batesville, Miss.

The aforementioned Renfro was probably the top performer from the entire game. Scheduled to pitch the fifth inning, Renfro was called to the mound in the fourth inning after righthander Chris Jenkins was removed from the game with an injury to his pitching arm (Jenkins was hit on the elbow by a throw from catcher Austin Maddox, attempting to catch a stealing Brian Goodwin at second base.) Renfro entered the game and faced eight batters, striking out five. The 6-feet-3, 200-pound righthander's fastball sat between 88-90 mph, touching 92 mph. He also showed an over-the-top downer curveball at 74 mph. Renfro is a two-way prospect, and took advantage of his lone at-bat in the game, driving a hanging changeup in the left-field bleachers.

Jake Eliopoulos, lhp. Sacred Heart Catholic HS, Ontario

From Canada and new to the showcase scene, the Under Armour All-American Game was Eliopoulos' debut for many of the scouts in attendance. In his first inning of work, Eliopoulos struggled through some nerves, giving up three hits including the home run to Renfro. However, striking out the final batter of the eighth inning seemed to settle him down. Eliopoulos returned to the mound in the bottom of the ninth, threw 13 total pitches and tallied two strikeouts, including Tate to seal the win for his team. Listed at 6-foot-3, 170 pounds, Eliopoulos threw an 86-88 mph fastball and low 70s curve. He may have work to do from now till next June, but Sunday was a big day for the Canadian.

"It was an awesome experience," Eliopoulos said. "It was my first showcase like this, and I wanted to do my best. I was a little nervous, but I think I did well to settle down."