

SPORTS



SIDELINES

ANDY HALL

*Straw can hear
boos, even though
they're undeserved*

Myles Straw is trying to live the dream while living through a dream and a nightmare.

He lost his father and became a father 10 days apart in January. He's pressing on through the joy and sadness, trying to make an Opening Day roster in the major leagues – and getting booed.

It's nothing personal. It's the team for which Straw is employed – the Houston Astros.

A center fielder on back-to-back Mid-Florida Conference championship teams with St. Johns River State College in 2014 and '15, Straw has developed into a multi-purpose player with the Astros, who selected him in the 12th round of the 2015 draft. A September call-up in 2018 (remember that), he was with the big club most of last season, batting .269 with seven RBI and eight stolen bases. One of the most popular highlight clips of 2019 spring training was of Straw robbing the Mets' Tim Lincecum of an extra-base hit.

"He has a great shot to make the roster breaking camp. He's excited," said SJR State coach Ross Jones.

Amid the boos.

The Astros, of course, are baseball's pariahs these days for the electronic sign-stealing scandal that will forever taint their 2017 World Series championship season. Straw was in the minors, then, not remotely related to the high-tech trickery, but he hears the boos in the spring of 2020.

Jones and Straw communicate frequently, though less so these days as Straw goes through spring training and Jones prepares the Vikings for the start of Mid-Florida Conference play on Monday. They haven't talked about the sign stealing.

Meanwhile, one of Straw's SJR State teammates, first baseman Nate Lowe, is trying to make the Opening Day roster of the Tampa Bay Rays. He bounced between Tampa Bay and triple-A Durham last season, hitting .263 with seven home runs and 19 RBI in the majors, lasting long enough to be named American League Player of the Week on the strength of a July series with the Orioles. Then the Rays, in desperate need of right-handed power, sent the left-handed Lowe down once more.

"Expanding the roster from 25 to 26 really helps," Jones said. "I think Myles was a set thing. I think going to 26 under the collective bargaining agreement helps Nate. It depends on how many left-handed hitters they keep."

■ You'd think one ex-Viking with no concerns about his big-league status would be Howie Kendrick, the 2002 St. Johns product who had the postseason of a lifetime last year with the Washington Nationals. His extra-inning grand slam eliminated the favored Dodgers in the NL Division Series, he was MVP of the National League Championship Series and he hit the go-ahead home run for the Nats in Game 7 of the World Series with the dreaded Astros. You'd be wrong.

Sam Rick, who coached Kendrick for his single season at St. Johns and was the only person to offer him a scholarship out of West Nassau High School, went to see his prize pupil last week in West Palm Beach and

said Kendrick faces challenges this spring.

"The guys they have at second and third are both real smooth. Defensively, they're better than Howie now because he's so old (36). But the hitting is the question," Rick said.

Kendrick, who broke in as a second baseman with the Los Angeles Angels in 2006, could end up as a utility man for Washington in 2020, playing every infield position except shortstop as well as left field and designated hitter when the Nationals are playing American League teams.

See HALL, Page 6A

Hall

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5A

■ Did you know it's illegal for a base coach to so much as brush against one of his runners when the ball is in play? There's an umpire in Crescent City who didn't know last week, when PHS coach Alan Rick intentionally grabbed one of his guys while the Panthers were pulling away from the Raiders.

Palatka had a healthy lead on Crescent City in the fourth when a light rain that threatened to become a heavy rain was beginning to fall. With that in mind, Rick wanted to get through the fifth so the game would become official and didn't want to prolong his team's turns at bat. Thus he grabbed a runner at third in full view of the umpire, but didn't get the out he wanted.

Rick's dad and assistant coach, the aforementioned Sam Rick, did the same thing twice under similar circumstances in a game in which his Lake City Columbia team was beating up on Gainesville High. In that case it worked, but not before the umpire asked Sam Rick if he realized what he was doing.

The rain eased a bit, the game ended 12-0 after five innings move and there were no complaints of disrespect from Crescent City coach Tim Ross.

■ There it is on the Interlachen High School boys weightlifting schedule: July 9, Tokyo Olympics.

Andy Hall is sports editor of the Palatka Daily News.