

# Pirates GM scouts Spikes' young talent

By Jake Kaplan  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The State College Spikes know when they have certain spectators watching their games from behind home plate at Medlar Field at Lubrano Park.

Monday and Tuesday's games were two of those times.

Pittsburgh Pirates GM Neal Huntington was in attendance for the latter two games of the Spikes' three-game homestand against the Vermont Lake Monsters. Huntington, who took over as GM in the fall of 2007, picked a good night to spend at the ballpark Monday as he saw his short-season Class A affiliate tie a franchise record with 20 hits in a 13-2 win.

Tuesday afternoon, however, he was not as lucky as the Spikes fell to the Lake Monsters 3-1.

Overall, Huntington said it was a positive visit and though he did not address the team as a whole as he did in his August visit last season, it was nice to get more familiar with the players in the Spikes' clubhouse.

"I love watching the young players," Huntington said after Tuesday's game.

"I love watching the guys in the system play really at any level. But the entry levels are always the most fun as you get a chance to see a guy whether it's in his first professional experience or first experience under the lights so to speak. It's always enjoyable to get out and see the young guys play."

First baseman Matt Curry hit

is first professional home run Monday night, a monster shot into the right field bleachers, a special moment for the Pirates' 2010 16th-round pick in itself. But the fact the man who drafted him was there to witness it, might have made it a little more memorable.

"You always know when they're around because people are talking, people are whispering 'Hey, they're here, they're here,'" Curry said after Monday's game.

"You just can't get too hyped up. You've got to stay in the present moment and that's just what I had to do tonight."

Infielder Kelson Brown, a 34th-round pick this past June, also showcased his talent in front of the GM with four hits Monday and another one Tuesday.

"You can say that they don't really make us play any different but when you've got people and eyes up above you looking at you, you get a little bit more energy and a little bit more excited," Brown said.

Aside from Curry, Brown and other 2010 draft picks selected out of various colleges, much of the 2010 Spikes (13-12) roster is made up of 2009 selections out of high school. That list includes a plethora of the Pirates' top pitching prospects from that draft, including second-round pick Brooks Pounders, fourth-round pick Zack Dodson and sixth-round selection Zack Von Rosenberg. Trent Stevenson and Colton Cain, seventh and eighth rounders in 2009, respectively, are also with State College. All, save Stevenson who recently



Matt Curry (left) makes an out in a game earlier this season. Curry hit his first professional homerun in front of Pirates GM Neil Huntington Monday night.

turned 20, are merely 19-years-old.

"Without question we challenge them," Huntington said. "It's a much more advanced level than where you typically take them in terms of the progression, and they've responded well."

"The reality is they throw strikes and keep the ball down, work quickly and then let their defenses play their part and put guys away when they get a chance to. They're going to be

successful regardless of the level."

Huntington, who has a busy couple of weeks ahead of him with Major League Baseball's non-waiver trade deadline on July 31, said the Pirates will continue to stick with their player-specific pitch counts with their young prospects.

While some other clubs in the New York-Penn. region stretch their pitchers out, the Spikes haven't let a starting pitcher go more than five innings thus

far in the young season.

"The history of the game is littered with guys who had great arms that were blown out young," Huntington said. "If you are trying to get back in shape you don't go out and run a marathon the first day. So we're trying to build these guys' arms, we're trying to build their bodies, we're trying to build the mentalities and build a fundamental game as well, and it takes time."

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## Spikes

From Page 6.

bounces today, and couldn't really put anything together, consecutive hits or any type of pressure on them consistently."

Vermont (18-7) got out to an early lead in the first inning for the second-straight contest. Lake Monsters' second baseman Hendry Jimenez tripled off Spikes starting pitcher Tyler Waldron, and then scored on a sacrifice fly by shortstop Stephen King.

Their 1-0 lead held up until the sixth when a two-run double by Russell Moldenhauer to left-center field off State College reliever Trent Stevenson increased the margin to three.

Three Vermont pitchers combined to give up the one earned

run on eight hits, while walking just one. Shane McCatty, who pitched innings five through eight, was the pitcher of record for Vermont, improving his record to 2-1. Waldron, who threw a solid five innings of four hit ball, was tagged with his second loss.

State College was going for its second three-game sweep of the year — they swept the Williamsport Crosscutters July 1st through 3rd — and at the same time looking to hand the Lake Monsters their first three-game losing streak of the year. Vermont holds the best record in the New York-Penn League — none of the other 13 teams has more than 15 wins.

"Any time you're playing a good team you've got to bring you're A-game every day," Skirving said. "We just didn't do that today, and it

just means we couldn't get the sweep.

If we bring it like we did the last couple nights than that's a winnable game and potential sweep."

The Spikes hit the road to start a series with the Connecticut Tigers, which starts at 7:05 tonight.

Curry, who said the team was hoping to string together a long winning streak after the first two wins against Vermont, is hopeful State College will bounce back from Tuesday's loss.

"We were just saying we were going to go a long run, long streak and we thought this was it," Curry said.

"We'll just start it up again on this road trip."

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## Pitching

From Page 6.

games against the Cyclones either, scoring a total of seven runs in the three games.

And although the offense again had its struggles Tuesday, the hitters know that if they start to produce a little more, the pitching staff will start picking up more wins.

"If they give up three runs then

we shouldn't give away a ballgame like today, but we just didn't hit," first baseman Matt Curry said after Tuesday's loss.

"If they keep pitching like they have been this last series, we should be fine."

A glimpse of what Curry was talking about came in the second game of the Vermont series. Five different Spikes pitchers combined to allow just two runs and six hits over nine innings, while the hitters notched a record

20 hits and scored 13 runs.

That kind of performance has the team excited as it prepares to head out on a six-game road trip against Connecticut and Auburn.

"Any time you've got three-straight days of good pitching, it sparks the entire staff," third baseman Kelson Brown said. "Everyone wants to own-up each other and that's what makes the pitching staff good."

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## Boss

From Page 6.

claimed to have gotten in an elevator fight with two Dodger fans after a Game 3 loss in 1981.

Of course, in Gilbert's situation, Steinbrenner would have been able to throw infinite money at James.

He did that for four decades.

In his early years it was Catfish, Reggie and Winfield, and in the years leading to his death, he drove fans of 29 other teams crazy by inking names like A-Rod, Giambi, Mussina, Matsui and Sheffield to lucrative contracts.

The incessant desire to win-by-cash is ultimately what made Steinbrenner so scrutinized and so hated.

Was it bad for the game? That's a debate for another column. But Steinbrenner was allowed to win by spending, and that's what he did.

Sure, he had the most money, but he also cared more. Pirates fans, tell me with a straight face you'd rather have the Nuttings as your owners than a man who spent in order to win seven World Series and 11 pennants.

The lasting memories of Steinbrenner will hopefully be the ones of him arguing with Martin or calling out Dave

Winfield for being "Mr. May." They epitomize his brash desire to win.

I grew up watching 130 Yankee games a year, and it was rare that I agreed with the Boss. He called out Torre, a man who earned him four titles, far too often, and he put unhealthy pressure on general manager Brian Cashman to raid the farm system to overpay for bigger names.

But, I am a fan of the New Jersey Nets (yes, we exist), and I have watched, first-hand, a franchise demolished by majority owners who cared about earning a buck more than a title.

That was never the case with George, and, as a fan, isn't that all you can ask for?

Remember in Anchorman, when Vince Vaughn's character, Wes Mantooth, tells Ron Burgundy, "With every inch of me, I pure straight hate you. But damnit, I respect you."

The same has to apply for critics of Steinbrenner.

Rest in peace, George. The Yankees are champions, and I'm sure you wouldn't have wanted to die any other way.

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## Royster

From Page 6.

gave time to regroup and prepare for a season in which he has the opportunity to cement his place among Nittany Lion greats.

The opportunity to break Curt Warner's rushing record, as well as the possibility to surpass 1,000 yards for the third consecutive season, are all on Royster's radar.

Though Royster said he spoke to Warner just a few times as he tried to downplay the significance of the record, Warner said when the redshirt senior closes in on the milestone they will surely talk.

But, Royster's decision to return for his final season was never completely dictated by a chance to shatter records. It was about coming back, helping his team improve and preparing for his professional future, he said.

With the Lions still undecided on a starting quarterback, having Royster in the backfield is a valuable asset. The ability to have a reliable running back is something quarterback Matt McGloin is looking forward to, but he doesn't want Royster to be the only one making plays.

"He's so smooth, and he's a hard worker. All the focus isn't going to be on him this year."

Matt McGloin  
Quarterback

"He's just a great football player," McGloin said.

"He's so smooth, and he's a hard worker. All the focus isn't going to be on him this year. All the quarterbacks are going to have to step up and make plays because either that or the teams are going to start stacking the box."

However, regardless of whether or not Royster racks up the 481 yards he needs for the school rushing record, he said his work this summer is just the beginning of his future.

"What I've heard also is that the biggest day of my life is that combine," Royster said. "So it's something that I will train hard for, and actually after the season's done, I'll get right into it and try to make myself the best I can be for that."

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