

MILLER PRESENTS BLACK COLLEGE SPORTS PROFILE

Sanders: Jackson State's jack of all trades



A Pitcher AND A Hitter

Sanders does damage at the plate, too, as the Tigers' top hitter (photo by Mark Gail).

By LONZA HARDY JR.
Review Staff Writer

Earl Sanders is no ordinary college baseball player. But then, he's no ordinary individual either.

The 6-4, 210-pound native of Moss Point, Miss., is rapidly becoming one of the nation's most versatile performers. Just a sophomore, he's Mr. Everything on the Jackson State University team, ranking as the Tigers' top pitcher *and* batter.

He leads the Tigers in practically every statistical category there is, including wins and earned run average as a pitcher, and batting average, runs scored and runs batted in as a hitter.

The secret to Sanders' success on the diamond is no secret at all. He's simply a multi-talented athlete who plays with his team, not himself, at heart.

"No, there's not any secret to what I do and I don't classify myself as a superstar," says Sanders. "God gave me talent and I'm using it to the best of my ability. I'm just an average ballplayer who's trying to do the best he can in the game."

Sanders' flirt with mere averagedom occurred in 1984, when he was just a rookie. His pitching statistics then included a record of 5-6 and an ERA of 4.30.

His hitting was more respectable, though, at .362, and he scored 22 runs, batting in 23.

But, oh, what a difference a year makes.

So far in 1985, Sanders had ranked among the SWAC leaders in both pitching and batting. He sports an impressive 8-1 record on the mound, along with a 2.92 ERA.

At the plate as a designated hitter he holds a lofty .404 batting average, tallying 69 hits, 54 runs, 12 homers and 57 RBI.

"The difference in Earl this year, as opposed to last year, is a matter of maturing," says JSU Head Coach Robert Braddy. "He's growing up and he's learning. The incredible thing is that he has the ability to be successful while learning. He has so much potential."

One of seven children, Sanders says he's been playing baseball for "as long as I can remember."

Sports, he says, was to his family not simply a means of recreational activity, but a way out of the ghetto.

"Coming from a big family, we were all involved in sports," Sanders recalls. "That's what we did to stay out of trouble. We'd all stay around each other at home and play sports rather than get out on the streets."

A team leader at Moss Point High School, Sanders never fully gained statewide recognition for his athletic prowess. All-state and all-conference honors passed him by, yet he was the consensus MVP of his team in pitching, batting and fielding. Fortunately for him, the college scouts respected his abilities.

"Alcorn, Southern, San Diego State and Jackson State were the major schools that tried to recruit me," says Sanders. "I chose Jackson because, playing two positions, I felt JSU would let me use my ability in both areas. I haven't regretted it."

If Sanders hasn't regretted coming to Jackson State, one can rest assured that Coach Braddy hasn't second-guessed his decision to recruit him. In fact, Braddy goes as far as to say that Sanders has developed into one of his all-time best athletes.

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Braddy says the only thing his ace needs to work on is aggressiveness. "He's as gentle as a baby," Braddy says. "He smiles. It'd take a lot to get him angry. He needs to be a little more aggressive."

As for his post-college plans, Sanders says he hasn't given them much thought. A computer science major, he's content on making a career in that field if the chance to play major league ball passes him by.

"I'm not the type of person who sits around thinking about his future," he says. "I'm a one-day-at-a-time person. What happens, happens."

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