

## Everyone's abuzz about this Yellow Jacket

Contributed by Tim Young  
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No sophomore slump for Ohio native and Georgia Tech shortstop Derek Dietrich

Derek Dietrich's dream is to play major-league baseball.

Two years ago, Dietrich had a chance to make that dream a reality when he was the first pick of the Houston Astros in the 2007 Major League Baseball First-Year Player Draft. Instead, Dietrich chose to put his dream on hold and decided to go to college.

"We just couldn't reach a deal with the Astros," Dietrich said.

The 6-2 shortstop chose to better his skills by enrolling at Georgia Tech University, whose climate and coaching staff were to Dietrich's liking.

"Coach [Danny] Hall is one of the best in the country and I wanted to go somewhere warm," said Dietrich.

Dietrich, the 2007 Ohio Gatorade Player of the Year, had his mind set on Georgia Tech from the start.

"The atmosphere is like being on a big-league team," said Dietrich.

Indeed, the ACC is one of the best conferences in the county. Currently, five teams from the ACC are in the Rivals.com Top 25, including Georgia Tech who is ranked 8th.

"Many say the ACC is the equivalent to A or AA ball," Dietrich said. "You have to be at your best. There is no room for error."

Coming out of Ohio, Dietrich set school records as a four-year letter winner at St. Ignatius High School in hits (136), runs (108), home runs (18), doubles (42), RBI (125), walks (75) and singles (73). He was the No. 1 draft prospect in Ohio and was a 2007 High School All-American by Baseball America and Louisville Slugger.

"I didn't feel any pressure," Dietrich said. "I just played the game and let everybody have their own opinion."

Dietrich took that mentality into his freshman year at Georgia Tech. He started all 62 games and hit .332 with 14 home runs and 66 RBI. That success led Dietrich to be named the 2008 National Freshman Player of the Year by Rivals.com and National Freshman Hitter of the Year by the NCBWA. Dietrich also was a first-team Freshman All-American by the NCBWA, Collegiate Baseball and Rivals.com. He was a member of the 2008 Gold medal-winning USA National Team at the FISU World University Championships.

With all the success of his freshman year, Dietrich has tried to put last year behind him and knows that teams will be looking for him.

"You have a target on your back," Dietrich said. "Being one of the top players you get pitched differently. You have to be more patient, more relaxed and confident."

Through 49 games this season, Dietrich hasn't run into a sophomore slump. He has started every game and is hitting .321 with nine home runs and 49 RBI.

Dietrich has been named to the 2009 Brooks Wallace Award watch list. The award previously had gone to the national player of the year, but will now honor the country's top shortstop. Dietrich received another invite to try out for the 2009 USA National Team.

All of Dietrich's success has come with hard work and willingness not to let things get in his way.

In Ohio, Dietrich didn't let the bad weather get in the way of his dream. Sometimes the weather was so bad that they couldn't get onto the field.

"Sometimes we wouldn't get any practice before games or we were snowed out," he said.

Dietrich took his own initiative to help himself improve. He trained at an indoor facility in nearby Westlake, Ohio, that is

owned by a representative of the Colorado Rockies. At the facility, Dietrich was able to work with such big-leaguers as Travis Hafner of the Cleveland Indians, Ryan Church of the New York Mets and John McDonald of the Toronto Blue Jays.

&ldquo;I was lucky to be able to pick their brain and learn from them,&rdquo; Dietrich said.

Dietrich has the makings to follow one of his former rivals to the majors. Former Georgia Bulldogs shortstop Gordon Beckham&mdash;the No. 8 overall pick in the 2008 draft by the Chicago White Sox&mdash;was someone who Dietrich followed last season. As the season progressed, Dietrich tried matching Beckham&rsquo;s numbers and was close until Beckham pulled away at the end of the season.

&ldquo;He&rsquo;s a great player and he added more competition,&rdquo; Dietrich said.

Dietrich still has one more season left before he is eligible for the draft again. If the opportunity presented itself, Dietrich would head to the pros and forego his senior season.

&ldquo;That&rsquo;s the best case scenario,&rdquo; Dietrich said.

Right now, Dietrich is more concerned with this season. The Yellow Jackets are in the hunt for a trip to the College World Series in Omaha, and he likes his team&rsquo;s chances.

&ldquo;Were a better team this year than last year,&rdquo; Dietrich said.

Last season, Georgia Tech was eliminated in the Athens Regional by rival and national runner-up Georgia.