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16. PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL-Scouts Honor

Pat Shortt / MLB Scouting Bureau

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By Jonathan Mayo

Spring is the busy season for Pat Shortt. No, he's not an accountant. From the end of January to the end of May, Shortt will spend almost every day watching a high school or college baseball game as a scout for the Major League Scouting Bureau.

Now in his ninth year covering a Northeast region that includes New York City (the five boroughs excluding Staten Island), Long Island, Westchester County, Putnam County, Dutchess County, Columbia County and part of Connecticut, Shortt puts more miles on his car over those four months than many of us accrue in an entire year. But Shortt doesn't mind it one bit.

"I love my job," said Shortt, who played for two years in the Milwaukee Brewers system and coached at the college level before becoming a scout. "I'd rather do this and be happy than do something else. Right now, I'm satisfied and I'm happy doing what I do."

What exactly does Shortt do? The Major League Scouting Bureau is a centralized scouting organization that provides reports on possible prospects who are eligible for the upcoming draft to all 30 teams. During the summer months, Shortt will see younger players to develop a "follow" list of those who will be eligible for the following year's draft. Shortt spends almost all of the spring seeing these "follows" again to determine whether they qualify as Major League prospects.

Shortt grades every player he sees, both on present skills and future potential in a variety of areas to come up with an OFP (Overall Future Potential). If the player's OFP reaches a certain level, he's considered a prospect. Shortt had filed 25 follow reports. Twenty-one were positive reports, four were "removes" (players on Shortt's original list who no longer made the grade), and numbers Shortt said were about average for him.

While there are occasions that a player Shortt liked a year earlier doesn't improve or even loses something to remove himself from prospect status, the reverse also happens. Shortt filed a report on a pitcher this year who didn't seem like anything special. But over the course of a year, he added several miles per hour to his fastball to force his way into prospect status.

"Sometimes, they become a horse of another color," Shortt said.

While watching a player during a game is obviously important, how a player warms up can be equally educational. From gauging how an outfielder attacks a ball and throws to getting a sense of an infielder's hands, Shortt will get a very good sense of what a player brings to the table even before he's played. And after nine years in the business, he's seen one skill lag behind on a consistent basis.

"The weakest tool among high school and college players is throwing ability," Shortt said. "They don't want to work on it. Everyone wants to grab a bat and hit."

Shortt's track record provides reason enough to listen to what he has to say. He's had a high percentage of kids he's graded as a prospect get drafted and lists Major Leaguers like Giants teammates shortstop Rich Aurilia and pitcher Joe Nathan, Red Sox second baseman Lou Merloni, Mets pitcher Allen Watson, Tigers reliever C.J. Nitkowski and Expos starter Carl Pavano among the players he originally scouted in the New York area. Of course, his reports aren't always followed. "Some kids I don't write up end up getting drafted," Shortt admitted. "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

It might sound like Shortt has the perfect job, spending all day outside watching the future of baseball in action. But Shortt warns those dreaming of filling his shoes one day that it's not all fun in the sun. Most of his job is spent away from the diamond, writing reports and compiling lists. "You have to be a self-starter," Shortt said. "If you put things off like some people do, you're not going to last long. "We at the Major League Scouting Bureau are open to criticism because our reports go to all 30 clubs (as opposed to scouts who work for a specific team, whose reports are only seen by those within that organization). If you're a thin-skinned guy, you can't work for the Major League Scouting Bureau."