

# Matt McPhearson Slowed But Unstopped By Cold Weather

By Nathan Rode (*Baseball America*)



Matt McPhearson (Photo by Alyson Boyer Rode)

UPPER MARLBORO, Md.—Outside of the usual warm-weather states like California, Arizona and Florida, the 2013 season has been brutal for baseball. Temperatures have barely sniffed normal levels and precipitation has jumbled schedules from the high school level to the low Class A Midwest League. The cold weather has also indirectly affected Matt McPhearson’s run at breaking his own record.

An outfielder at Riverdale Baptist School in Upper Marlboro, Md., McPhearson set the Crusaders’ record for stolen bases in a season with 68. He set a goal of swiping 75 in his senior year, but that is in jeopardy after McPhearson has missed eight games this season with a nagging hamstring.

“It’s pretty frustrating, not being able to break my record from last year,” McPhearson said. “I was trying to get 75, but hopefully I can still get it. If I can stay healthy for the rest of the season I believe I can have a good shot at it.”

McPhearson was being worked on the trainer right up until he took his pregame swings in the batting cage, but said he was 100 percent and ready to go. He may be holding back a little right now to be cautious as the only ball he was able to run out fully to first base came in the sixth inning when the temperature dipped into the 40s. He got down the line in about 4.2 seconds from the left side on a hard groundball to the first baseman. He reached safely on a borderline single as the first baseman had trouble handling it.

In McPhearson’s first at-bat he hit a routine fly to center that was mishandled by the center fielder, but ruled a hit as he reached second base. He struck out in his second at-bat as he was caught out front and then he skied a pop-up to shortstop in his third at-bat.

The pitcher for Bishop McNamara High (Forestville, Md.) was lefthander Tayler Stiles, who is committed to Maryland. He stands at 6-2, 220 pounds and sat 87-88 mph early with a soft curveball in the low 70s.

McPhearson’s game is all about speed. When healthy, he rates as an 80 runner on the 20-to-80 scale so he needs to put the ball on the ground and take off, something he admits he is still working on.

“I’m working on being consistent at the plate and getting the barrel on the ball more often, just driving to drive the ball to left field,” he said.

His swing can get long at times and has an upper-cut path right now, but McPhearson is a quick-twitch athlete with a tightly wound frame and strong forearms. He has good bat speed so he could tap his potential with some mechanical adjustments. Given the time he’s missed, McPhearson was happy with where he was in his first game back.

“Coming back from a week off—I was off track a little bit because of not seeing the ball,” he said. “It was

hard for me to regroup and get my eyes back to the pitching. Overall, I think I did pretty good for my first day back. It was fun to come out here and get a win.”

Riverdale Baptist had a 6-foot-7, 180-pound right-hander on the mound in Ryan Selmer. He overmatched opposing hitters so McPhearson only got one play in center field all night, a lazy, routine fly ball. His arm will be an average tool at best.

“Matt is still learning the game,” Riverdale Baptist head coach Terry Terrill said. “He’s from a football family so he’s just getting better and better. He’s the fastest kid I’ve had. It’s fun to watch him get a base hit and go from home to second.”

McPhearson has four older brothers that played Division I football, one of which—Gerrick Jr.—was drafted in the seventh round of the 2006 NFL draft out of Maryland. Speed runs in the family as Gerrick Jr. reportedly ran 40-yard dash times in the 4.2-second range, but ran a 4.42 at the NFL combine because of a tender hamstring.

The stolen base record that McPhearson broke was previously held by Terrill’s son Ryan, who is now an associate head coach on the team. Ryan Terrill stole 50 bases in 2001.

Selmer, a senior, flashed interesting stuff in his start. He sat in the high 80s with solid life down in the zone. He also mixed in a breaking ball that had varying break, but occasionally showed sharp bite. He is currently uncommitted, but there was word that may change very soon. He pitched a complete game and didn’t allow a hit until the fifth inning. He allowed three runs (one earned) on five hits and two walks. He struck out the first five batters he faced and finished with eight on the game.