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Strausborger quickly making name for himself

By Terry Massey
For The Sun News

The biggest sports name to come out of Indiana State is Larry Bird, but the longest last name may belong to Myrtle Beach Pelican Ryan Strausborger.

However, after just two months with the Advanced Class A Pelicans, the rookie center fielder appears well on his way to joining the list reserved for those with impressive athletic accomplishments and the next big name to come out of the small school in Terre Haute, Ind.

"[Bird] is a legend there, and I don't think anyone can ever top him," said Strausborger, the Texas Rangers' 16th-round pick in last June's draft. "But maybe I can make a name for Indiana State, too."

Strausborger was suiting up for the Sycamores just over a year ago, earning All-Missouri Valley Conference honors in his final three seasons while playing three different positions. Now in his first full season of pro baseball, Strausborger has settled into his position in center field nicely and is turning heads with his offense, defense and, most of all, his speed.

"That's my game," said Strausborger, the only Pelican to start every game this season. "If I can get on base, I'm looking to score whether it means stealing or just making good base-running decisions. If I can stretch a single into a double or a double into a triple, I'm going for it."

Strausborger currently leads the team in batting average (.303), doubles (16) and triples (seven) entering today's series opener against the Frederick Keys, and he also tops the Carolina League in total hits (80), runs scored (44) and games played (66). He tops the team and is second in the league in total bases (125) and stolen bases (21).

Getting on base has quickly become Strausborger's specialty. He enters today's game with a streak of 26 consecutive games of getting on base, the longest in the league this season.

"Really? That's the first I've heard of it," Strausborger said. "To me, that's what you're supposed to do. That's my goal every time I come to the plate."

Strausborger is a big reason the first-place Birds are on the verge of winning the first half Southern Division title. Following Wednesday's 5-4 loss to Potomac, Myrtle Beach held a two-game lead on Kinston with four games left to play in the first half.

"Ryan has done everything well for us - hitting, fielding and especially running," Myrtle Beach manager Jason Wood said. "His speed is what makes him so dangerous. He puts a lot of pressure on opposing pitchers when he gets on base, and that helps in ways that don't show up in the box."

Although his numbers are impressive - he's batting .303 with 37 RBIs and six homers - the stat sheet alone doesn't do justice to Strausborger's play-making abilities.

During the latest homestand, he made a diving catch at the wall to rob a batter of a home run and also made a pinpoint throw to the catcher to gun down a runner at the plate. Both plays drew "oohs" and "ahhs" from the crowd, but only drew an F-8 and a putout in the box score.

Strausborger was selected as a starter in next week's California League-Carolina League All-Star Game in Modesto, Calif., an accomplishment that wasn't even on his list of goals coming into the season.

"I never imagined when I came here that I would make the all-star team," Strausborger said. "It wasn't even in the back of my mind. I was just coming in hoping to work hard and play well."

The low-key strategy has served him well. No one may have been expecting big things from the kid from Indiana State with the long last name, but soon everyone may recognize it.

But unlike Larry Legend, who will always be a Bird, Strausborger may not be a Pelican for long. Given his quick success at the Advanced-A level, he may soon continue his ascent up the minor-league ladder.

"I love playing in Myrtle Beach, but it's all of our goals to play well here so we can move up to the next level," he said. "I hope to keep moving up until I make it to the majors."

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