

Welcome to Haguer's Town

★ 2014 Souvenir Program Cover Story ★

2,000 MILES AWAY FROM
HIS HOMESTEAD, MATT HAGUE
FOUND NEW DIGS IN INDY

★ FIRSTBASEMAN ★ THIRDBASEMAN ★ COACH ★ HITTING CHAMP ★ MVP ★

Story by Chris Robinson

Photo by Adam Pintar



Wearing an Indians flat-billed hat pulled down just over the top of his eyes, a sleeveless shirt that reveals tattoos running up and down his arms, baggy sweatpants and athletic shoes, Matt Hague sees the last kid to the door before closing down his youth hitting clinic for the night.

It's 9:00. It's been a long day. And on top of his offseason routine, extra workouts and running his youth baseball camp, he still has that interview he agreed to do.

Hague shuffles into the locker room. He unstraps his batting gloves and sits down for the first time in what seems like ages. Behind a grin that hides any hint of exhaustion, he laughs, "I like to stay busy."

That's just the kind of guy Hague is.

Even after six years of professional baseball, including a cup of coffee in the big leagues with the Pittsburgh Pirates in 2012, he's always felt driven to help others. No request is too small (see autograph sessions before games). And none too big (see offering sliding lessons to the Indianapolis Colts). For Hague, it's all just part of his life both on and off the field.

"I have a passion for giving back to the game," he said. "I enjoy giving back to the community; It's just fun for me and I like doing it."

Need proof? Swing by the batting cages during the offseason for a class or two on hitting. Just make sure you pick the right session though - he offers more than one.

"I like new opportunities, teaching new kids," Hague said

of continuing his clinic when he moved from Seattle, Wash. to Indianapolis. "I've been doing the camps for so long, it's just one of those things I look forward to in the offseason. Then the opportunity arose here and I said 'Why not.'"

And why not? That simple, two-word notion has led Hague to become an all-time fan favorite on the field and in the Indianapolis community. A sort of who's who of the Indians team. The kind of ballplayer that spends time with the General Manager, fans, coaches and media, all before even taking the field for the night's game.

Only catch is you'd have

stint in a TV studio, where he may have overshadowed his baseball ability with an infamous weather forecast for ABC's local affiliate. An experience described by a guy who faces 90+ mph fastballs for a living as, "the hardest thing ever."

After swapping their spikes and jersey for two-piece suits, Hague and teammate Chase d'Arnaud wrapped up a full day of baseball with a segment on the evening news. The duo, pointing at what could have, possibly represented a heat wave out in some part of the United States, turned in their second clutch performance of the day by delivering



"I have a passion for giving back to the game. I enjoy giving back to the community; It's just fun for me and I like doing it."

to see it for yourself, because he'll never brag about all the attention.

Then again, maybe Hague did bring some of the attention on himself. His MVP-caliber season surely didn't hurt the cause. Neither did his one-day

the weather to their fellow residents of Indianapolis.

Though the game film would later reveal a less-than-perfect delivery in front of the green screen, a small critique didn't stop Hague from reaching out to offer his services as a

"substitute anchor" or to cover a meteorologist's "sick day."

"You kind of just surround yourself in [staying involved]," Hague said. "I've lived here three years now, so I think that it's almost become a second home for me."

THE HIT COLLECTOR

After producing 165 hits in 2011 and 153 base knocks in 2013, Hague became the first player to lead the IL in hits during two different seasons since 1985-86 (Mike Sharperson, Syracuse).

promising Indians outfielder Michael Brantley.

With ballplayers like that, you might say Hague was rooted in baseball.

And coming out of class-4A Kentwood High School - which even recently produced the Pirates No. 1 overall selection Reese McGuire in the 2013 MLB Draft — Hague was no exception.

The promise has been there from day one. Hague's talent never going unnoticed; As a two-way player at class 4A Kentwood High School, Hague was voted first-team All-State as a pitcher AND second-team All-State as an infielder in 2004. In fact, while leading his team to a second-place finish in the state of Washington, he batted .500, established a South Puget Sound League record with 31 RBI, recorded a 1.89 ERA on the mound and won nine of his 11 decisions as a starting pitcher.

Hague's high school coach later would describe him as having the most focus and drive of any player the instructor had ever seen play baseball. This, of course, was even before Hague broke big-league camp with Pittsburgh in 2012, becoming the first Kentwood product to ever reach the Majors.

"Thus far, I've felt pretty good," Hague said after validating his coach's hype with a spot on the Pirates Opening Day roster in 2012. "Baseball is about consistency, so I have to keep doing it, come to the ballpark every day with a focus

on handling what I have to do," Good call, coach.

Hague, after his dominant performance through high school, then followed in his father's footsteps and enrolled in the University of Washington to continue his baseball career. The previously two-way star began his collegiate career expecting to see action both on the mound and on the field, but much to his chagrin, had only worked as a relief pitcher through the early part of his freshman season. He hadn't even recorded an official at-bat when the Huskies entered Pac-10 play.

Turns out, that's all he really needed, an at-bat --

Or two to be exact.

"My first game [in the lineup] was against Arizona," Hague said. "I hit two home runs in the same game. Ever since then I was in the lineup every day."

What was originally a toss-up decision for the Washington freshman - between hitting or pitching - began to take shape after his multi-homer performance against Arizona. Hague pointed out that while he enjoyed both pitching and playing as an everyday infielder, he had experienced more success with the bat once he reached the collegiate ranks. His stats at the end of his freshman season told a similar tale, with Hague recording a .412 batting average compared to a 6.52 ERA.

"I really had no idea until I hit those two home runs and finished with a pretty good season at the plate. That's when and I was like, 'I kind of like hitting,'" Hague said.

'Kind of liking' hitting

Hague's first home of Bellevue, Wash. might have actually played a small part in the infielder's short-lived broadcasting career. While the Seattle suburb's notoriety is usually tied to local Fortune 500's like Microsoft and

Verizon Communications, Hague's hometown is also somewhat of a baseball factory with homegrown MLB talent like two-time Cy Young Award winner Tim Lincecum, former Pirates pitcher and 2010 All-Star Evan Meek and

turned into a share of the Washington's team MVP award by the end of his freshman campaign, as well as a growing trend away from his role as a reliever. The following season saw his duties on the mound drop from 19.1 innings in 13 games to just one, 2.0-inning appearance, while his work in the field increased from 41 games to 60 contests from 2005-06.

The position change wasn't without warrant, however, as Hague wrapped up his sophomore season with a .381 batting average and both first-team All-Pac 10 and third-team All-America selections.

Entering what proved to be his last year with Washington, Hague followed a similar path to his standout career in high school by again leaving a lasting impression in his final season with the team. By the end of his junior campaign, Hague had paced all Huskies batters in runs scored, hits, home runs, total bases and walks, while also ranking as the only Washington player to start all 56 games. To top everything off, his .353 average was the highest of all Huskies batters who started at least 45 games during the 2007 season.

It was the kind of season that usually leads to a cover shot of that year's NCAA baseball video game -- or in Hague's case, he'd at least settle for high batting ratings for his video game's character.

"I guess I am one the better power guys," Hague laughed when asked about his high power-hitting ratings in the "MVP: NCAA Baseball" game.

Shrugging off the hype, he added, "Who really knows."

But the success of Hague's junior season also brought a decision that would ultimately define his future in baseball. A decision that, unlike his previous career-changing move, weighed much more heavily than simply picking between being a pitcher or an everyday fielder.

While Hague succeeded at the individual level during his junior year, his Washington team struggled in the standings to barely post a record above .500. As the Huskies limped to a lack-luster 29-27, Hague was selected by the Cleveland Indians in the 11th round of the 2007 MLB Draft; a middle-round pick with 346 names announced before Hague's.

"I wasn't necessarily happy with where I went in the [MLB] draft after my junior year," Hague said. "I had nothing to lose by going back to school and trying to get my degree in the meantime. I also knew that if I transferred, I wanted to go to a national powerhouse college."

And so the conversations began.

Conversations with family (should I leave my hometown university and father's alma mater three years into my collegiate career) -

And former high school teammates also playing college ball (what are my other options to continue playing baseball without signing professional) -

And perhaps most importantly, with himself (What do I really want; staying at Washington, pursuing my dream of playing in the College World Series or beginning my professional baseball career).

Not an everyday decision

for the 22-year-old ballplayer.

In the end, Hague's various dialogues led to a landing spot described only as a true "polar opposite of Seattle." A complete, 180-degree shift in landscape from a town that rarely reaches 70 degrees, to one that rarely drops below 70. Where rainy is now sunny and where 2,000 miles away from the Starbucks headquarters, there wasn't a single franchise in Hague's new city (one was built in 2008).

We're talking a senior-year transfer from Seattle, Wash. to Stillwater, OK, where one of the only things the Huskies and OSU Cowboys have in common, is college baseball.

"Up in Washington it was always raining, and at the ballpark, the wind blew in towards the field," Hague said. "Oklahoma State was warm, the wind blows out, and really, with the fans, just the whole sports atmosphere there is crazy. They love all sports down there, but especially their baseball."

Hague chose to pursue his dream of reaching the College World Series by joining an OSU roster that featured future Major Leaguers Tylor Lyons (St. Louis Cardinals), Jordy Mercer (Pittsburgh Pirates), Andy Oliver (Detroit Tigers) and Robbie Weinhardt (Detroit Tigers). That season, led by Hague's team-high .442 on-base percentage, the Cowboys went 44-18 in the regular season and earned a No. 1 seed in the Stillwater Regional Bracket of the NCAA Division 1 playoffs.

With the College World Series in sight, Hague and OSU opened the double-



LAUGHING MATTER

Always a joker, Hague, with the help of Indians production staff, offered via YouTube to teach Colts quarterback Andrew Luck how to slide after the second-year gun slinger was criticized for not doing so in big games.

elimination tournament with a 5-3 victory over No. 4 seed Western Kentucky. However, the Cowboys were upset 5-3 by No. 2 Wichita State to drop into the "loser's bracket" for a matchup against No. 3 seed Texas Christian University.

Down but not out, OSU clung to life by riding a walk-off home run from Mercer to defeat TCU 9-8 and advance to a rematch against the Shockers in the Regional finals. Yet in an unfortunate twist of irony for the Cowboys, one game after claiming their walk-off victory, OSU suffered a similar fate when their postseason run ended on a walk-off grand slam from the Shockers.

The defeat sent top-seeded



Hague with Carroll: Adam Pinter (2013); Hague Slide: Mark Dickhaus (2013)

OSU back to campus having never set foot inside the historic Rosenblatt Stadium in Omaha, Neb., including their star senior-transfer Hague, whose pursuit of the College World Series was to forever remain unfinished.

"I don't regret [transferring to OSU instead of picking Washington or MLB] at all,"

Hague reflected in 2011, just a few months before making his MLB debut. "I think everything happens for a reason and I'm happy where I'm at now."

Hague's climb to his first appearance in the Majors officially began during June of his senior season with OSU. For the second consecutive year, Hague was selected in MLB's Amateur Draft, this time by the Pittsburgh Pirates. The four-year letter winner was actually the second Cowboys alum picked by the Pirates in 2008, going as the Bucs' ninth-round selection (264th overall), just six rounds behind Mercer.

Plus, along with being drafted in tandem with college teammate Mercer, Hague's selection also brought additional intrigue as Baseball America began publishing reports suggesting scouts

hadn't entirely given up Hague's 94 mph fastball as a relief pitcher at Washington.

Truth be told, Hague might not have given up either.

A few seasons later, Hague, who had caught some ribbing over the years for his frequent requests to throw bullpen sessions, found himself at the center of accusations from his teammates. Despite his insistent dismissals, Hague was ruled guilty by several of the team's catchers for trying to relive his "glory days" as a reliever with Washington. An eruption of laughter from the Pirates' locker room revealed the final verdict.

"Well, I haven't thrown in forever," Hague later joked with reporters, all but fessing up to the accusations.

While Hague has never truly reconsidered his choice to abandon pitching, his clubhouse confession came to light when he was given his first relief opportunity of his professional career during the Tribe's regular-season finale of the 2013 season.

Holding a 5-2 lead in the bottom of the ninth, Hague retook the mound for the first time since pitching as a Huskies reliever. The hard-throwing righty gave his best impersonation of a former bullpen arm, still touching mid 90s with his fastball, but after striking out two batters, he trudged off the field as the game-winning, walk-off grand slam sailed into the parking lot.

Yes, the parking lot.

"That ball was long gone," Hague said with a grin. "It left the stadium and probably the whole parking lot. I don't think

Fast Facts

Matt Hague

Hague was drafted by the Pirates in the ninth round (264th overall) of the 2008 Major League Baseball Draft as a third baseman. He began his professional career that season with the State College Spikes of the Class-A Short Season New York-Penn League, before he was promoted to the Hickory Crawdads of the Class-A South Atlantic League. In 2009, Hague played for the Lynchburg Hillcats of the Class-A Advanced Carolina League, where he began playing first base. That year, he finished third in the Carolina League with a .293 batting average.

Hague was promoted to the Altoona Curve of the Double-A Eastern League in 2010, where he was named the team's Iron Man. Hague batted .309 with 12 home runs and 75 runs batted in during the 2011 season with the Indians, leading the International League in hits and receiving midseason and postseason International League All-Star honors.

After impressing the Pirates with his power in 2012 spring training, He made the Pirates' Opening Day roster and made his MLB debut on April 7. He recorded his first MLB hit on April 8, a pinch hit RBI single off of Philadelphia Phillies pitcher Kyle Kendrick.

Born: 8/20/85

Birthplace: Bellevue, Wash.

Resides: Indianapolis, IN

B/T: R/R

Ht: 6'3"

Wt: 225

College: Oklahoma State

Drafted: 9th Rnd, Pittsburgh

Acquired: 2008 MLB Draft

MLB Debut
4/7/12

Minor League Career Statistics

Batting Average	.296
Hits	783
Home Runs	53
RBI	366
Stolen Bases	18

Awards and Honors

IL Player of the Week: 5/27/2013

MLB.com Organization All-Star: 2010, 2011

IL Post-Season All-Star: 2011

IL Post-Season All-Star: 2011

I even saw it come down.”

With the Indians having previously clinching their second straight International League West Division title a few weeks earlier, Hague and his teammates were able to enjoy the lighter side of both the defeat and Hague’s pitching meltdown.

That, plus it’s hard to fault a player like Hague after he served as the team’s leader that season, earned the Tribe’s MVP award, set several Victory Field single-season batting records and led the entire league in total base hits.

And despite Hague’s stance that he “doesn’t pay attention to those kind of things” like stats and records, his fellow teammates in the clubhouse, on the other hand, have noticed. They’ve noticed through his standout play and unwavering leadership that the third-year “team captain” always provides an example on the field and guidance off it in the clubhouse.

“I’ve been here awhile, so I think people can come to me and ask me certain things,” Hague said. “I try to help as much as I can, try to show how to go about your business and to not get on the emotional roller coaster of baseball.”

Which is no easy feat when the Tribe has won at least 75 games in each of Hague’s three years in Indianapolis.

Recalling some of his locker room advice, the team captain said he has stressed to the Indians the importance of practicing a short memory around the ballpark to combat any added expectations from their successful three-year stretch. Hague said he tries to

help keep his team even-keeled by preaching the ability to forget any poor performances as the year wears on, because a slump is just a small sample from six solid months of baseball.

It’s as the age-old adage goes; the baseball season is a marathon, not a sprint.

“I know that if I have a bad game the day before, I’m going to shake it off and go about my work the same on the next day,” Hague said. “Knowing there’s a big picture out there [in baseball] and focusing on that type of mentality makes it easy for everyone in the clubhouse to show up every day.”

Literally practicing what he preaches, Hague has shown up to the ballpark every day since he reached the Triple-A level with Indianapolis in 2011. The team ironman appeared in 141 of 144 games with the Indians in 2011, 121 contests between Indianapolis and Pittsburgh in 2012 and 142 of 144 of the Tribe’s tilts in 2013. In fact, the few times he was kept off the lineup card were only at insinuations from his coaches.

Note that’s off the lineup card, and not off the field. Hague has actually been spotted in the first-base coach’s box on a few of his off days during his career.

“I guess you can kind of say I’ve done a little bit of everything here,” Hague admitted after adding “coaching first” to his Indians resume that already featured hitting, running, pitching, forecasting the weather and managing a youth clinic. “I like to be involved anyway I can, and sometimes that means stepping into the

first-base box.”

Yet, of the many talents listed on his Tribe resume, Hague’s most impressive contributions to the Indians franchise have still come while taking the field as a standout infielder. The 28-year-old will enter the 2014 season already holding team records for games played (374), at-bats (1,437), hits (422), doubles (87), RBI (198), walks (144) and total bases (591) since the Tribe moved to Victory Field in 1996.

In actuality, even listing each and every record still short-changes the slugger’s accomplishments.

Here’s another way to look at his unmatched career; In 17 seasons at Victory Field, the next-closest Indians batter has 77 fewer hits (Yurendell DeCaster), 59 fewer bases (DeCaster) and 23 fewer RBI (Neil Walker) than Hague - And Hague can only add to his lead in 2014.

That type of sustained excellence can only be properly be put into words by longtime Indians broadcaster Howard Kellman, who for better or worse, accurately dubbed Hague as “The Hit Collector.”

“I get a hard time about it around the clubhouse, but it’s all just fun and games,” Hague joked about his oft-referenced nickname. “It really is cool to be named and have that kind of label stick, even if I try not to pay attention to that

kind of stuff.”

For those who do want to pay attention to that stuff, the 2014 season will feature plenty of milestones for Hague’s illustrious career with the Indians. Along with likely passing the Victory Field era record for most runs scored in a career (16 more runs to break the record), Hague will also have the opportunity to become the first three-time MVP in franchise history, as well as the first batter to lead the team in hits in three different seasons.

And those last two records don’t stop in the Victory Field era. They span the franchise’s entire history dating back to 1887.

“I never thought I would hold some records here one day,” Hague said. “I think it’s pretty great for it to happen. I always thought if I played hard and had fun doing it, then that kind of thing gets noticed.”

Believe me, it has been noticed, by just about everyone except for Hague himself. Even after posting some of the best numbers in franchise history, Hague says he’d prefer to leave a much different legacy in the Tribe’s record books.

“I want to be known for being a good team guy, that I had fun while I was playing and that I played hard,” Hague said.

And what of all the record-setting seasons?

“I think playing hard and having fun have always been the most important things,” Hague said.

On the baseball field. In the news room. Around Indianapolis -

That’s just the kind of guy Hague is. □

ON THE WEB

Stay in the game. For continued stories, updates and news, visit IndyIndians.com. Or connect with the Indians on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.