

Curtain Call

THE OFFICIAL INDIANAPOLIS INDIANS MAGAZINE

A Decision Made at Peace

Anthony Alford was a multisport, superstar athlete who made the call in college by choosing baseball over football

Pg. 26

PLUS

CODY PONCE'S
DREAM OF
PITCHING IN
THE MAJOR LEAGUES
WAS NOT QUITE
WHAT HE IMAGINED

Pg. 55

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Curtain Call

THE OFFICIAL INDIANAPOLIS INDIANS MAGAZINE

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TICKETING



- Tickets for all events will need to be purchased in advance at IndyIndians.com or by calling the Victory Field Box Office at (317) 269-3545.
- Digital ticketing provides a safe, convenient and secure way for fans to use and share game tickets. It also helps prevent lost, forgotten and fraudulent tickets and provides a contactless entry solution for all fans coming through the gates at Victory Field.



MODIFIED CONCESSIONS

- Stands will be cashless and the menus simplified to lower wait time for fans queued in lines. Credit and debit cards will be the only forms of payment accepted.



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- Victory Field has implemented the use of industrial-grade, mobile sanitization units that will be used to disinfect surfaces throughout the stadium prior to, during and after events. Hand sanitizing stations for public and staff use have been added to high-traffic areas.



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- If you are experiencing a fever, cough, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, or other symptoms that could be related to COVID-19, please stay home and we welcome you to join us again in the future.

[Click Here to Read Our Full Fan Health & Safety Guidelines](#)



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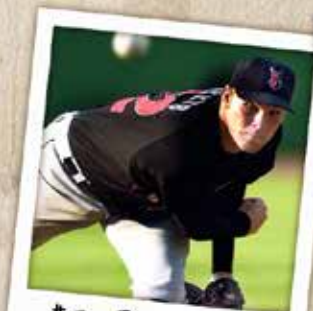
#8 - J.J. Hardy
(Shortstop)



#7 - Starling Marte
(Outfielder)



#6 - Sean Casey
(First Baseman)



#5 - Ben Sheets
(Starting Pitcher)



#4 - Gerrit Cole
(Starting Pitcher)



#3 - Paul Konerko
(Third Baseman)



#2 - José Bautista
(Third Baseman)



#1 - Andrew McCutchen
(Outfielder)

[Click Here to Read More about our All-Time 25 Roster](#)



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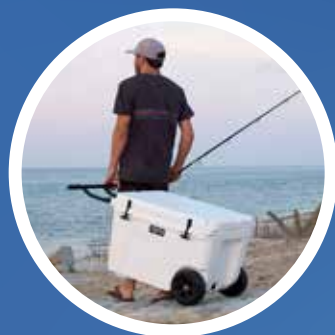
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BEN SHEETS | SP

BATS: Right **THROWS:** Right
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BORN: 7/18/78 in Baton Rouge, LA

	W-L	ERA	G	GS	CG	SHO	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	WHIP
MLB TOTALS	94-96	3.78	250	250	18	4	1596.2	1577	736	670	369	1325	1.22
IND TOTALS	4-6	2.92	16	15	1	0	92.1	91	36	30	34	65	1.35

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

After being selected by Milwaukee as the 10th overall pick in the 1999 First-Year Player Draft out of Louisiana-Monroe, Ben Sheets wasted no time getting to the Circle City. He began the 2000 season in Double-A and joined Indianapolis for its run to the postseason. In 14 games (13 starts), he went 3-5 with a 2.87 ERA (26er/81.2ip), the lowest ERA of an Indians starter with more than 75.0 innings that season, but was left off the postseason roster with an innings limit for the year.



Sheets' stellar finish to his 2000 season earned him a spot on Milwaukee's Opening Day roster as its No. 4 starter. He made his major league debut on April 5 of that season and went on to earn his first of four National League All-Star bids with the Brewers. He returned to Indianapolis late that season for two starts and went 1-1 with a 3.38 ERA (4er/10.2ip) before his big-league career took off for good.

After three consecutive seasons with an ERA over 4.00, Sheets solidified himself as one of the game's best starters. Sheets' most memorable big-league performance came on May 16, 2004 when he struck out 18 batters in a complete-game win vs. Atlanta. That season marked the best of his career, and he finished the campaign ranked among NL leaders with a 2.70 ERA (3rd), 264 strikeouts (2nd), five complete games (T-2nd) and 0.98 WHIP (2nd) to finish eighth in NL Cy Young voting. His 8.25 strikeout-to-walk ratio led all major league qualifiers, and his bWAR of 7.2 was second in the NL to former Indianapolis Indian Randy Johnson.

After eight seasons with Milwaukee, Sheets elected free agency. The remainder of his career was plagued with injuries; his elbow shortened his 2010 season with Oakland and his shoulder did the same in 2012 with Atlanta. He retired on Oct. 3, 2012 after striking out two batters in one inning for his final career start.



CYCLES OF THE *Victory Field Era*

8/7/18 VS. LEHIGH VALLEY

**KEVIN NEWMAN (5-FOR-5, 2 2B, 2 R, 3 RBI)
AND JACOB STALLINGS (4-FOR-5, 2 R, 3 RBI)**

In what has become fondly known as the Indianapolis Indians Bi-Cycle game, Kevin Newman and Jacob Stallings accomplished a feat that has only happened twice in baseball history. With an eighth-inning Newman home run and a Stallings triple three at-bats later, the Indians had clinched their first and second cycles since 2016 in the same inning.



4/22/16 AT LOUISVILLE

JOSH BELL (4-FOR-5, 2 R, 5 RBI)

With two outs in the top of the ninth inning at Louisville, Josh Bell capped off an incredible performance with a triple to center field. He singled in the first to begin his night and lifted the Indians to an eight-run third with a leadoff double and two-out grand slam as the team batted around the order. It was Indianapolis' first and only cycle during a road game in the Victory Field era.



6/2/12 VS. SYRACUSE

JEFF CLEMENT (4-FOR-4, 2 R, 3 RBI)

The Indians eventual season leader in hits, doubles, home runs and total bases cemented himself in Victory Field history with a cycle in June. He doubled and singled in consecutive innings to begin the game and finished the feat with seven total bases during his final two at-bats. Jeff Clement's performance led the Indians to a comeback 7-3 win after facing an early 1-0 deficit.



6/27/10 VS. TOLEDO

ALEX PRESLEY (5-FOR-6, 2 1B, 2 R, 2 RBI)

Alex Presley began his impressive performance with a two-out triple in the first inning and did not slow down, clinching the second cycle in Victory Field history in the fifth. A double in the fifth inning finished off the feat for the Indians in a game they won, 15-3. Presley's bat stayed hot as he hit his second single of the day in the sixth inning for his fifth consecutive hit in the game. It was the Indians first cycle since the 2003 season.



7/10/03 VS. NORFOLK

JASON CONTI (4-FOR-5, 3 R, 3 RBI)

The Indians came back from a 4-2 deficit in the third inning thanks to a cycle performance by Jason Conti. He went 4-for-5 with three runs scored and three RBI to lift Indianapolis to an 8-5 win while clinching the first cycle in Victory Field era history. He was the only Indians player to hit a home run in the game and recorded three of the team's five extra-base hits.





The Indianapolis Indians Baseball Card Collector

Lifelong fan has over 2,300 unique Indians baseball cards

by **CHEYNE REITER**

Like many who stroll through the Victory Field gates every summer, Kevin Garrett is an Indianapolis Indians fan through and through. However, one thing separates Garrett from thousands of Indians fans over the years — he's an avid Indians baseball card collector. He's not alone in that regard, it's just that by his count and confident prediction, he may have the largest collection of Indians cards ever.

Garrett attended games at Bush Stadium during his childhood alongside his father and grew accustomed to watching the pros before they were pros... Razor Shines, Randy Johnson, Dallas Williams, Delino DeShields and Marquis Grissom, to name a few. Much like other young Indians fans around his age in the late '70s, Garrett started collecting baseball cards here and there. Eventually, as most hobbies come and go, he phased away from card collecting and life took its course. When the Indians made their move to the corner of West and Maryland, Garrett followed suit from the stands.



In 2012, Garrett attended another game at Victory Field with his father. Little did he know, the spark of card collecting was a steady flame. The giveaway that night was the 2012 Indianapolis Indians card set, and he hasn't missed a team card set giveaway night since.

Fast forward to present day, where Garrett has stockpiled 2,302 unique subjects and variations out of the 2,572 documented Indianapolis Indians cards he has on file. The cards range from the pre-war era all the way through the 2021 mystery card set giveaway on Prospects Nights this past May.

"With no official team set [in 2021], the mystery card set giveaway presented a challenge to



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obtain every card," Garrett said. "I owe a lot of thanks to the Indians fans who helped me complete the entire 25-player set."

Every mystery card pack from this year's Prospects Night giveaway contained five randomized trading cards, including one that was autographed. It took 20 packs and many duplicates before Garrett finally had all 25 cards from the set. That's just one example of how Garrett has fulfilled his card sets over the years.

Aside from Indians fans, Garrett is a frequent visitor to eBay or comc.com, where he's purchased entire sets or single cards, with a handful of his online purchases falling in the \$100-150 range. Cards that have caused Garrett to pony up for that high of a number include Ke'Bryan Hayes, Andrew McCutchen and Gregory Polanco unique serial number cards.

Online purchases have sometimes turned Garrett toward investigative work, too. He once purchased a 2002 Bill Hall card on eBay that he couldn't identify. Garrett already had the entire 2002 team set, but this specific card had an Indianapolis skyline, American flag and Marsh Grocery Store sponsor logo all on the front with Hall's picture. It was card No. 3 of a set, but which set the card belonged to left Garrett pondering. After coming across a 2003 set that was also sponsored by Marsh, he realized the Hall card was part of a five-card set that was a perk for members in the Marsh Kids Club, known today as the Knot Hole Kids Club.

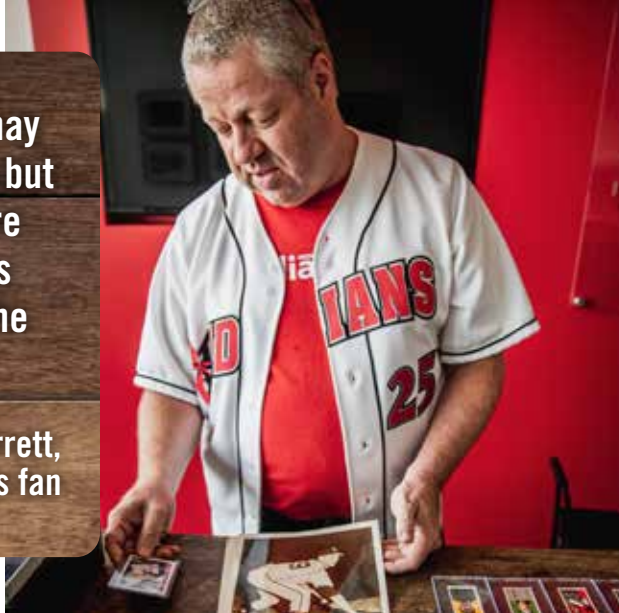
Garrett currently has four of the five cards from the 2002 Marsh set, including Hall, Izzy Alcantara, Ryan Thompson and Jon Zuber, but one is still on the loose.

"I am missing either the manager or Rowdie," Garrett said. "One of those two were always in future Marsh sets."



“I have a nephew who may be interested in the set, but I ultimately want to share this set and have Indians fans know more about the cards themselves.”

**- Kevin Garrett,
Indianapolis Indians fan**



In addition to online purchases and conversations to secure cards from fellow Indians fans, Garrett – who started his collection from scratch – has stumbled across cards occasionally at hobby shops and even more rarely at garage sales, although with the latter, the unknown of what will be up for sale has him seeking alternative, more efficient methods. The most efficient method to date was him buying out one Indians card collector a few years ago to become the only full Indianapolis Indians collector.

With so many cards in hand and hundreds more on the horizon, one set and a few individual cards stand out as his personal favorites. The 2002 Marsh set leads the way with individual favorites including a red-bordered Topps Gregory Polanco autographed card, a coin relic Ke'Bryan Hayes autographed card that is only one of eight in the world, and an autographed Gerrit Cole card he got in person when “The Cole Train” steamed through Triple-A.

Polanco, Hayes and Cole are all from the current Pirates affiliation, but Garrett’s collection also includes originals from Indianapolis’ 1989 team set that featured two future Hall of Famers – Randy Johnson and Larry Walker. The list goes on and on.

He has a handful of Sertoma Indians cards as well in the form of Bob Logan, Al Lopez and Herb Score, and his oldest cards come from The Monster – T206 Tobacco Baseball Card Set from 1909-11. The Monster had 600-some total subjects, with five Indians ballplayers as part of the set – Charlie Carr, Jimmy Burke, Jack Hayden, Paul Davidson and Monte Cross.

Garrett’s long-term plan for his card collection is still undecided.

“I have a nephew who may be interested in the set, but I ultimately want to share this set and have Indians fans know more about the cards themselves,” Garrett said. “If the Indianapolis Indians were ever interested in displaying [the set] at [Victory Field], that’s something I’d consider exploring, too.”

Victory Field has experienced many upgrades in recent memory. Creating a space for 2,572 Indians cards (and counting) just may be next on the list. ♥

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**Kevin Kramer (7)
Outfielder/Infielder
Indianapolis Indians**

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VISITORS AT THE VIC



St. Paul Saints

Minnesota Twins Triple-A affiliate since 2021, Midwest Division
August 10-15, September 14-19

Get to Know 'Em: The St. Paul Saints were in affiliated baseball as a member of the American Association from 1902-60 and played Indianapolis during that time. Throughout that era, the Saints were affiliated with the White Sox (1936-42), Brooklyn Dodgers (1944-57) and Los Angeles Dodgers (1958-60). In 1961, the St. Paul franchise moved to Omaha and there was no professional baseball in the city until 1993. A new Saints organization returned and played independent ball in the Northern League (1993-2005) and American Association (2006-20) before joining the Triple-A East as the affiliate of the Minnesota Twins prior to the 2021 campaign. Dating back to 1938, the Indians are 247-257 against the Saints with a 7-5 record this season.

Players to Watch: The Twins farm system is currently led by SS Royce Lewis (No. 1, MLB Pipeline), who has spent the entire season on the 60-day injured list after tearing his ACL in the offseason. They recently improved their depth in the minors, adding Toronto's 2020 first-round draft pick, SS/OF Austin Martin (No. 2), and RHP Simeon Woods Richardson (No. 3) at the trade deadline on July 30. Both acquisitions have been assigned to Double-A Wichita, with Martin owning a .281 average (55-for-196) in 55 games and Richardson going 2-4 with a 5.76 ERA (29er/45.1ip) and 67 strikeouts in 11 starts at that level this season.

League Championships (2): 1948 (affiliated American Association) and 2019 (independent American Association)



Louisville Bats

Cincinnati Reds Triple-A affiliate since 2000, Midwest Division
August 24-29

Get to Know 'Em: Triple-A baseball in Louisville began in 1982 when the Louisville Redbirds, the top affiliate of the Cardinals, joined the American Association. During the American Association era, Indianapolis and Louisville faced off in the postseason four times (1984, 1987, 1994 and 1995), with the winner of each of those series going on to win the league championship. Since 1998, when both Indianapolis and Louisville joined the International League after the American Association disbanded, the Indians own a 222-215 record against their longtime rival with a 2-4 record this season. In the IL era, Louisville has been affiliated with the Brewers (1998-99) and Reds. It also rebranded as the Louisville RiverBats in 1999 and shortened the name to Louisville Bats in 2002.

Players to Watch: Two of the Reds top five prospects are currently seeing Triple-A playing time with the Bats and could be big game changers against the Indians over the final two months. Hard-throwing RHP Hunter Greene (No. 2, MLB Pipeline) earned his first Triple-A win against the Indians on June 23 after tossing five scoreless innings with six strikeouts, touching 100-plus MPH on his fastball. SS Jose Barrero (No. 4) joined Greene in being promoted to Louisville in June and is hitting .321 (35-for-109) with seven home runs and 26 RBI in 29 Triple-A games.

League Championships (4): 1984-85, 1995 (American Association) and 2001 (International League)



VISITORS AT THE VIC



Iowa Cubs

Chicago Cubs Triple-A affiliate since 1981, Midwest Division
August 31-September 5

Get to Know 'Em: The Iowa Oaks were founded in 1969 and kept that name through the 1981 season. Then in 1982, Iowa adopted the Cubs nickname after becoming the Triple-A affiliate of the Chicago Cubs the year prior. Indianapolis and Iowa were both members of the American Association from 1969-97, but Indy joined the International League and Iowa went to the Pacific Coast League when the American Association disbanded ahead of the 1998 campaign. Since 1988, Indianapolis is 95-72 against Iowa, including a 52-31 record in Indy. The Indians lost each of their first two series of the 2021 season to the I-Cubs; Iowa took three out of five from the Indians on May 4-9 and then won four of six in Indy from June 29-July 4.

Players to Watch: Injuries combined with multiple members of the Cubs' core being traded at the deadline have led to a remake of the I-Cubs roster since Iowa and Indy last squared off in the Circle City. Chicago's farm system is led by LHP Brailyn Marquez (No. 1, MLB Pipeline) who hasn't pitched in an official game this season due to a left shoulder strain. Following Marquez is OF Brennan Davis (No. 2) and C Miguel Amaya (No. 3). Both Marquez and Amaya are currently on the injured list, with Amaya being transferred to the 60-day IL on July 23.

League Championships (1): 1993 (American Association)



Nashville Sounds

Milwaukee Brewers Triple-A affiliate since 2021, Southeast Division
September 29-October 3

Get to Know 'Em: Professional baseball in Nashville has a long history, with the most current Nashville Sounds franchise opening a new era as a Double-A Southern League expansion team in 1978. They began their Triple-A affiliation with the Tigers (1985-86) as a member of the American Association and were later affiliated with the Reds (1987-92) and White Sox (1993-97). In 1998, the Sounds joined the Pacific Coast League and were affiliated with the Pirates (1998-04), Brewers (2005-14, 2021), A's (2015-18) and Rangers (2019-20). The Indians and Sounds played each other during the American Association era, and the Indians lead the all-time series, 151-142. The two teams split their first six-game series of the season in Nashville.

Players to Watch: Nashville comes to Indianapolis for the first time since 1997 in the final five games of the Triple-A Final Stretch to end the season. Three of Milwaukee's top 10 prospects are currently on the Sounds roster: LHP Ethan Small (No. 4), C Mario Feliciano (No. 5) and LHP Aaron Ashby (No. 7). Ashby has spent the most time with the Sounds this season, going 5-4 with a 4.95 ERA (31er/56.1ip) and 87 strikeouts in 19 games (10 starts). Nashville's roster also features some familiar faces to recent Indians lineups, with C Christian Kelley, INF Kevin Kramer and OF Troy Stokes Jr. all playing with the Indians within the past two years.

League Championships (1): 2005 (Pacific Coast League)

[VIEW SCHEDULE](#)



Ballpark MEMORIES



Crystal Francis

Our son, John, was born in the summer of 1996. One of his very first outings was to Victory Field at about 8 weeks old. He slept during most of the game, but it was a proud moment for us.

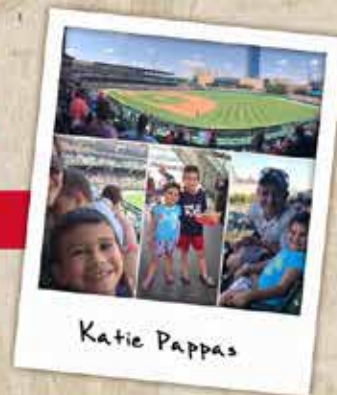


Matthew Harris

My wife and I celebrate our anniversary every year at Victory Field. We really missed you last year but are very hopeful to be celebrating again this year. All the best.

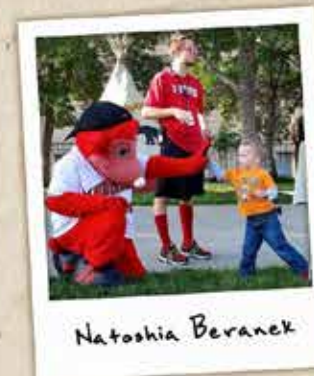
I was with a large group of friends on June 24, 2013, when shortstop Josh Harrison tied two Victory Field records by knocking two triples, both with the bases loaded, for a total of six RBI to boost the Indianapolis Indians (52-27) to a 10-5 win and series split with the Charlotte Knights (34-44) on a Monday night. Josh proved to be the most exciting Indianapolis Indian in 2013 and gave us a wonderful memory.

Curtis Shedlak



Katie Pappas

We brought 100 people from A Kid Again to enjoy a great day of baseball! This adventure helped these families take a break from illness, have fun and make memories together. At A Kid Again, we work in the community to provide adventures for families raising a child with a life-threatening condition. The Indians are a wonderful community partner, making sure everyone has access to enjoy America's greatest pastime!



Natoshia Beranek

This was taken a while back when my son went to his first Indians game. He loves Rowdie, and ever since this photo, he's played baseball every year and continues to love the game!



Marvin Brethaver

This is my grandson Sam visiting from Crested Butte, Colo. on Opening Day in 2015. He retrieved the ball during the game which the Indians won. We had a great time and it was a cool way to spend a beautiful afternoon with my grandson.

From the opening night as a fan to eventually becoming an employee and working eight seasons on the 3rd floor with an incredible staff and serving people from all over the world that came to enjoy this fantastic facility, nearly every night was a great experience and one of the highlights of my professional life. I got to take a picture of the sunset most nights from behind the press box and take in the moment of the incredible blessing that it was to be employed by this great franchise and serve the fans who come to the best baseball experience they could have. Thank you for this memory.

Dan Heylmann

A Decision Made at Peace

Anthony Alford was a multisport, superstar athlete who made the call in college by choosing baseball over football

by ANNA KAYSER

Anthony Alford was one field goal away from a high school state football championship. One decision away from beginning his college career in a Power Five football program. One week away from a win over Alabama at Ole Miss. One step away from a career in the National Football League.

Life is full of decisions; we all must make them. For Alford, his professional career has boiled down to one singular moment where his heart took him away from the gridiron and onto the diamond for good.

“I was at peace,” he said.

Alford’s high school football career was nothing short of greatness. As a senior starting quarterback in the highest class of football in Mississippi, he completed over half of his pass attempts for 2,058 yards – an average of 137.2 per game – and 20 touchdowns. At 6-foot-1, 215 pounds, he also rushed for 1,731 yards on 292 carries – an average of 5.9 yards per carry – with 24 touchdowns.

“He was, obviously, a raw-talent kid,” Steve Buckley, Alford’s high school football coach and mentor said. “He had everything you wanted in a dual-threat quarterback.”

Alford wasn’t a shoo-in starter the minute he stepped onto the football field at Petal High

School. His freshman year featured a fall of developing his raw talent into something tangible in Mississippi’s Class 6A.

By the time he reached his junior and senior years, the former of which culminated in a 113.2 quarterback rating, he was a standout in Mississippi. Alford was rated as a four-star prep, the second-best football player in the state, fifth-best dual-threat quarterback in the nation and No. 157 overall prospect.

He was the first player in history to be named the Mississippi Gatorade Player of the Year as both a junior and senior.

“Just watching his development as a player from technique of throwing the football to progressions of reads, it was crazy how it evolved over the three years,” Buckley said. “Anthony became a really, really good quarterback.”

After going 1-3 through its first four contests, Petal went on to win nine of its next 10 games. Alford’s senior season led up to the biggest game of his high school career: the 6A state football championship.

Alford, the starting quarterback in that game, was outstanding. He completed all eight of his passes for 166 yards – an average of 20.8 yards per pass – and three touchdowns. The performance tied his season high with three touchdown passes and no interceptions.

He called his own number 36 times in that game for a total of 207 yards on the ground, also tying a season high. His three passing touchdowns were met by as many rushing scores.

Petal lost to Olive Branch in a heartbreaker, 35-34. A successful field goal attempt to take a 37-35 lead was called back with seconds left to play, and the second attempt was missed.

One field goal away from a state championship.

“Just what he did in the state championship game; he controlled the clock and took control of the game with his legs and his arms... He was just on fire that night and executed the game plan to perfection,” Buckley said. “He was like that every day, he was just phenomenal, a great joy to coach. You could probably go to his baseball coach [and] his basketball coach, and they would tell you the same thing.”

Alford’s success during his high school career was recognized in multiple ways. He was invited to play in the U.S. Army All-American Bowl and the Mississippi-Alabama All-Star Game. For his future, he had his pick of different football programs across the country, with his personal choice being narrowed to two Power Five schools, Louisiana State and Nebraska, two schools with rich football history.





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“He had offers basically from every school in the country, but we always knew that baseball was a love also.”



**- Steve Buckley,
Alford's high school football coach and mentor**

“He had offers basically from every school in the country,” Buckley said, “but we always knew that baseball was a love also.”

As a child, Alford was pushed into sports. He grew up in a low-income apartment complex in Columbia, Miss. and there was negativity and temptation around that often sent kids in the opposite direction than where their full potential could take them.

Alford's mom, Lawanda, and his grandmother were his biggest supporters growing up as a child. Together, with the help of other family friends as times became difficult, Alford was signed up for different sports year-round to keep him focused on his future, rather than the negativity of his environment.

“Not saying that I was going to get into any trouble or anything, there was just the temptation around,” Alford said. “When I wasn't at school, I was playing sports. On weekends, I was playing sports. It just kept giving me something positive to reach my full potential with no distractions.”

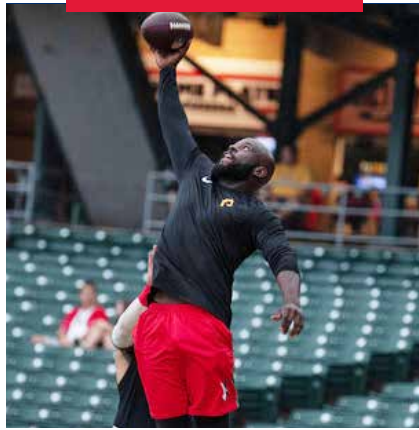
That potential, for those around him, was evident at an early age and only grew as he got older. His sports career began with tee-ball as a young child, around three or four years old, and as the skill level became more advanced to coach-pitch and beyond, Alford's talent was hard to miss.

“I think he was probably six or seven, it's kind of crazy. He was playing shortstop at the time, and he was awesome. Awesome,” Lawanda, said. “I've never in my life seen a kid [play like that]. I'm not saying that because he's my son, but he was just an awesome shortstop.”

Alford, a power bat and quick on his feet, made the transition to the outfield during high school and saw his success and accolades rise. In 89 varsity games he hit .437 (115-for-263)

with 15 home runs, a career-high seven of which came as a sophomore, and went 43-for-45 in stolen base attempts.

“Baserunning is just an ability that not every kid has,” Larry Watkins, Alford’s high school baseball coach said. “He has just unreal instincts on the bases. A lot of talented baserunners have to have great instincts because if they wait for a coach to tell them to go every single time, they’re going to be a step or two behind. He stole home in high school, he loved to play and have a lot of fun. He was a fan favorite because he was such a good kid, a nice kid too.”



He was part of back-to-back state championship teams in 2010 and 2011 and played in the Under Armour All-America Game at Wrigley Field in the fall after his junior campaign.

During his final year at Petal, he ranked above the national average with 30 games played, a .483 average (42-for-87), .569 on-base percentage, 31 RBI and 39 runs scored to be named Mississippi’s Mr. Baseball.

“He was a strong kid, he just had great instincts on the field,” Watkins said. “He’s just always been fast and strong, but he’s had to learn a lot... He worked hard, had a lot of interest [from] scouts in high school. We would get out to the field early and take [batting practice] in front of a group of scouts there.”

In his graduating class, Alford was the No. 2 ranked baseball player in Mississippi behind D.J. Davis, Toronto’s first-round draft pick in 2012 who never broke through to the major



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“I didn’t want to just commit to baseball out of high school and then look back and say I wish I would have tried [football]. I just didn’t want to have any regrets.”

**- Anthony Alford,
Indianapolis Colts Outfielder**

leagues. Nationally, according to Perfect Game, he was rated the No. 18 outfielder and No. 82 overall prep in a graduating class that featured Carlos Correa at No. 1 along with Lucas Giolito, Joey Gallo and Byron Buxton – to name a few.

There was a considerable amount of interest from major league clubs, with one scout even comparing Alford’s skills on both the diamond and gridiron to that of Bo Jackson. But growing up deep in Mississippi, near the boot of Louisiana, football was Alford’s first love and his biggest priority.

“I really just wanted to focus on going to college to play football and baseball until I decided what I wanted to do full time,” Alford said. “I didn’t want to just commit to baseball out of high school and then look back and say I wish I would have tried [football]. I just didn’t want to have any regrets.”

With his decision seemingly narrowed down to a pair of Power Five offers, Alford’s plans took a turn. Buckley accepted a coaching offer at Southern Mississippi, just a 15-minute drive from Petal, and Alford followed to keep his sights set on both sports while being close to home.

“It was going to be easier for me to play football and baseball,” Alford said. “My best

friend’s dad was a coach for the baseball team and my other best friend, his dad was the coach of the football team... I knew those were two guys that I could trust on both sides. Sometimes, college recruiters will tell you one thing, you get on campus and it’s two totally different things.”

One decision away from beginning his collegiate career in a Power 5 football program.

With his football future signed on paper and his baseball future within his sights, Alford’s decision to commit to both football and baseball earlier that year dropped his MLB draft stock, but not by much.

Regarded as a potential first-round draft pick by Watkins’ standards out of high school, the Toronto Blue Jays selected Alford in the third round as the 112th overall pick of the 2012 First-Year Player Draft.

“Once I got drafted by the Blue Jays, they made it so I could stay in school in the fall and spring semester and then just play baseball in the summertime,” Alford said. “It was kind of the best of both worlds, I got to see what it was like to get drafted out of high school and start playing professionally, and at the same time have college experience.”

Alford played one year at Southern Mississippi as a starting quarterback and transferred to Ole Miss in the spring following a coaching change. There, he sat out the 2013 season due to NCAA transfer rules and transitioned into a defensive back role.















He ran back two short punt returns and made three appearances at defensive back during the 2014 season. Ole Miss had won its first three games with Alford on the depth chart and was working on a bid to a New Year’s Six bowl.

“[He would have ended up] in the NFL,” Buckley said. “At six-foot, 210 pounds, he was physically developed. He was a physical football player, he has a great sports IQ and is a smart athlete, he’s tough mentally. He just had the makeup – I’ve been around 57 or 58 NFL guys in my career – he had the makeup that those same guys have.”

Alford was just days away from being part of an Ole Miss team that beat the Alabama Crimson Tide for the first time since 2003. He was, with two solid years as a Rebel, one step away from a career in the NFL. Instead, on Sept. 30, 2014, he permanently traded in his football spikes for ones of the baseball variety.

There were a number of things that got Alford to his turning point. He had gotten married that summer, just days after his 20th birthday, and he was considering the longevity of a career that would one day support children. He had to weigh the costs of injuries and concussions, especially at such a physical, defensive position.



			
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**“If you check
the boxes on
the goals that you
set for yourself,
the rest will take
care of itself.”**

**- Anthony Alford,
Indianapolis Indians Outfielder**



But most importantly, the sport he once loved just didn't seem to fit anymore.

“I was at peace. I said I wanted to play football at the highest level, and I gave it a shot. That's all I could do,” Alford said. “I was at peace, and I was just starting to lose the love for playing football. I wasn't having as much fun. That previous summer I had a lot of fun playing baseball, just meeting new friends from all across the country.”

After spending his first three seasons with the Blue Jays in rookie ball while splitting time between sports, Alford rose quickly through the ranks of the organization when he fully committed to baseball. He jumped from being Toronto's No. 18 prospect (Baseball America) in 2015 to being No. 1 in the system and No. 25 overall the next season. He made his major league debut with the Blue Jays in 2017.

“I made it to the big leagues,” Alford said. “That's a big accomplishment, especially coming from where I come from, not many people have done that. I still feel like I made the right decision.”

Now, Alford is one step away from a role on a big-league roster. With the chance to play every day and work through slumps, he has put together an impressive Triple-A campaign with Indianapolis. After beginning the season 0-for-12, Alford now owns a .301 average (52-for-173) with a team-leading 11 home runs, ranks third among Triple-A East qualifiers with a .424 on-base percentage and fourth with a .979 OPS.

But, in a testament to who Alford is as a person instead of the statistics and accolades that speak for his presence on the field, he doesn't view his career as a collection of milestones to fall just short of. He just wants to keep playing baseball.

“You can hit the ball hard four times right at somebody,” Alford said. “[I'm] just chasing attainable goals instead of chasing the numbers or chasing the hits. If you check the boxes on the goals that you set for yourself, the rest will take care of itself.” ♥

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How many words can you make using the letters found in the two words below?

INDIANAPOLIS INDIANS

Example: *Spin*

Pan

1

11

2

12

3

13

4

14

5

15

6

16

7

17

8

18

9

19

10

20

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by _____
(your name)

It was a _____ day in _____.
(weather word) (month)

The Indians were playing the _____ at
(opposing team name)
Victory Field. We took a _____ to get to downtown
(car/train/bus)

Indianapolis. I snacked on some _____
(food)
and _____ while we watched the game.
(food)

I was so excited to see _____
(favorite player's name)
play today. He's my favorite player! The Tribe _____
(won/lost)

the game. The score was _____ to _____.
(score) (score)

Baseball is my favorite sport, but I also like to watch
_____. I can't wait to come back to
(sport)

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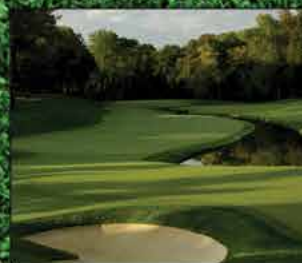


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BRAEDEN OGLE



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CODY PONCE



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ETHAN PAUL



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Inclusive For All:

Indians Receive Sensory Certification at Victory Field

Sensory wall installed in PNC Plaza and sensory bags
available for pick-up during games, events

by **CHEYNE REITER**

Near the end of the July, the Indianapolis Indians and Victory Field took another step toward becoming an all-inclusive organization and venue located in the heart of the Circle City. The organization received sensory certification through its partnership with KultureCity, making Victory Field sensory inclusive for all Indians games and events held at the ballpark. The initiative promotes an accommodating and positive experience for all guests and fans – approximately 600,000 annually – with a sensory issue who visit Victory Field.

“We are proud to partner with KultureCity and Damar Services to make Victory Field a community gathering place for fans of all abilities,” said Indianapolis Indians President and General Manager Randy Lewandowski. “The Damar Sensory Wall and sensory bags available for pick-up at guest relations during Indians games and special events allow families with unique abilities and sensory needs the opportunity to have an enjoyable visit to the ballpark.”

Earning sensory certification was a diligent process. The certification process entailed Indians staff being trained by leading medical professionals on how to recognize guests and fans with sensory needs and how to handle a sensory overload situation. Sensory bags – researched, tested and updated by KultureCity’s group of professionals – are equipped with noise-canceling headphones (provided by Puro Sound Labs), three unique fidget tools, verbal cue cards (produced in conjunction with Boardmaker) and weighted lap pads are



available to all guests at Victory Field who may feel overwhelmed by the environment. Further, these fans will also be able to use the Damar Sensory Wall for sensory relief. The wall can be accessed in PNC Plaza (center field) at Victory Field. Sensory signage was also installed by the Indians stadium operations team to complete the certification process.

“By offering the sensory wall and sensory bags, the Indianapolis Indians are demonstrating that they truly are welcoming to fans of all abilities,” said Jenny Peters-Reece, Damar Services, Inc. Chief Strategy Officer. “We’re delighted to partner with an organization that is dedicated to making a night at the ballpark a possibility for families impacted by autism and other developmental disabilities.”

Sensory sensitivities or challenges with sensory regulation are often experienced by individuals with autism, dementia, PTSD and other similar conditions. One of the major barriers for these individuals is sensitivity to over stimulation and noise, which is an enormous part of the environment in a venue like Victory Field. With their new certification, the Indians are now better prepared to assist guests with sensory sensitivities in having the most comfortable and accommodating experience possible when attending any event at Victory Field. According to [KultureCity.com](https://www.kulturecity.com), one out of every six individuals in the United States has a sensory processing need.

Prior to attending a game or event at Victory Field, families are encouraged to download the free KultureCity App where one can view what sensory features are available and where they can access them. The KultureCity App also includes a Social Story which provides a preview of what to expect while enjoying an Indians game or event at Victory Field, beginning with pregame expectations at the ticket windows all the way until the final out.

“To see families now attend a baseball game or event at Victory Field, a true community bonding experience, with their loved ones who have a sensory challenge and who were not able to previously attend, is truly a heartwarming moment. Our communities are what shapes our lives and to know that the Indianapolis Indians are willing to go the extra mile to ensure that everyone, no matter their ability, is included in their community is amazing,” said Dr. Julian Maha, Co-Founder, KultureCity. ♥

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Through THE YEARS

There have been many memorable moments at Victory Field over the last 25 years. Enjoy the timeline as we reflect on 25 of The Vic's greatest memories through the years.

JUNE 30, 2017



Howard Hits 6,000

After a lengthy rain delay, the 'Voice of the Indians' Howard Kellman called his 6,000th game for the Tribe.

JUNE 7, 2018

The Ultimate Competitor

Known for his drive to win at all costs, Lance Stephenson pulled off a hidden ball trick in the annual charity softball game that included media members and players from the Pacers and Colts.

JULY 28, 2017

Hall of Fame Recognition

After 60 years of devoted work with the Indianapolis Indians, Chairman Emeritus Max Schumacher was inducted into the International League Hall of Fame.



AUGUST 7, 2018

The Bi-Cycle

Kevin Newman and Jacob Stallings each hit for the cycle in an Indianapolis 12-5 win over Lehigh Valley. The duo both finished off their respective cycles in the eighth inning, with Newman's home run and Stallings' triple separated by only three at-bats.

SEPTEMBER 2017



A Suite Makeover

Renovations began on the Impact Suite Level as 30-plus suites were outfitted with new amenities including heat induction warmers in the countertops, furniture, big-screen TVs and retro jerseys honoring famous former Indians.

MAY 2, 2019

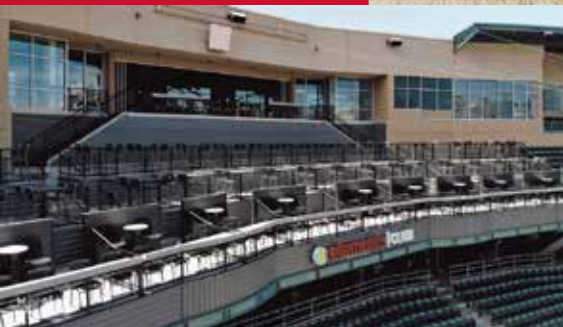
Circle City Indians

The Indians debuted their Circle City concept with new on-field jerseys and merchandise.



Through THE YEARS

SEPTEMBER 2019



Oh, You Fancy

Renovations began on the Elements Financial Club behind home plate, Victory Field's newest premium seating area. The spacious EFC features new furniture, big-screen TVs, a full-service bar in the shape of a home plate, a 37-foot retractable glass wall system, and outdoor seating including 10 private four-person loge boxes.

SUMMER 2020

A Summer Unlike Any Other

Without an Indians baseball season, Victory Field remained active by hosting numerous community and public events. Victory Field's 2020 schedule included a blood drive, ice cream social, three Grand Park College Summer League baseball games, a Grand Slam Auto Show, three movie nights, two weekends of golf and many private events.



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Victory Field PROGRAMS

Game day programs at Victory Field have evolved over the years, but one thing remains the same – they are the perfect commemorative souvenir for your game day experience. Click on any of the covers below to enjoy feature stories from those issues!



2013



2014



2015



2016



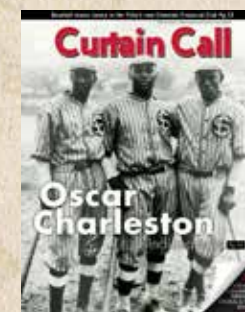
2017



2018



2019



2020

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SIXTY FEET, Six Inches

*Cody Ponce's dream of pitching in the major leagues
was not quite what he imagined*

by EMILY REESE

On a cloudy August afternoon in Chicago, Cody Ponce stepped onto the freshly cut grass of Wrigley Field and made his way to the one spot in the park that commanded constant attention. He toed the six-inch wide rubber in front of him. For as long as he could remember, this moment had been his dream.

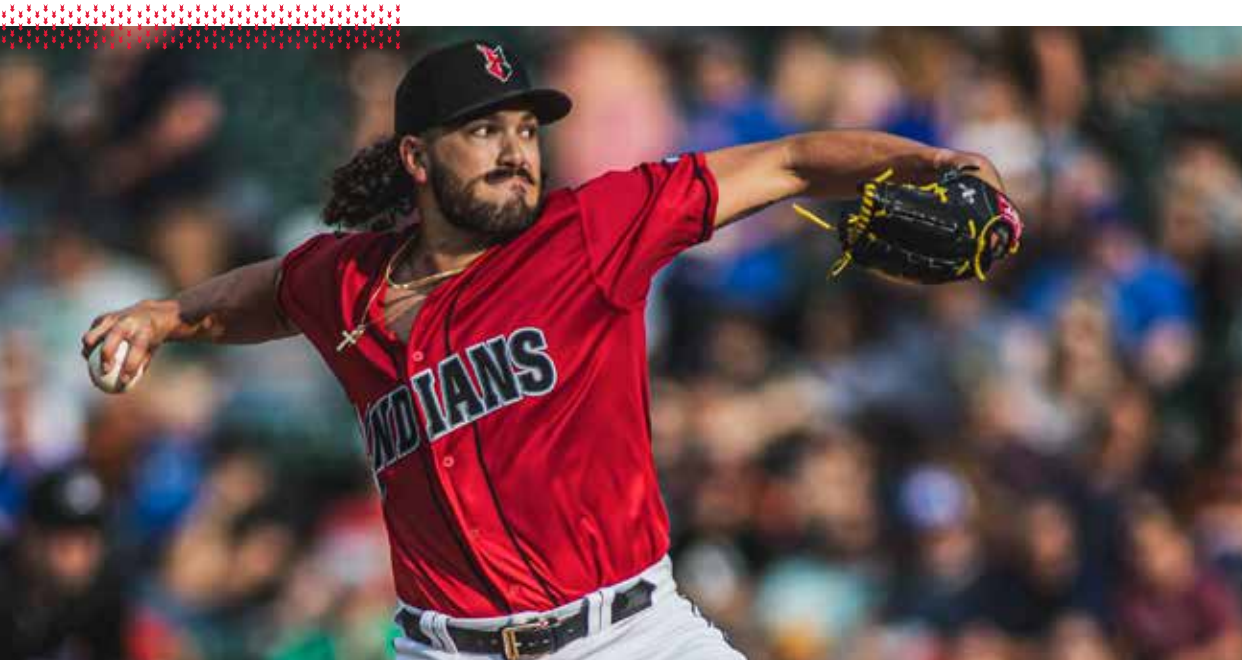
It just wasn't quite what he expected, and for the rest of his life something will be missing.

About 10 percent of all minor league baseball players will make it to the major leagues, improbable odds that were narrowed even further with the cancellation of the 2020 Minor League Baseball season due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ponce was one of the lucky ones. He earned a spot on Pittsburgh's Alternate Training Site roster when the season picked up in July.

On Aug. 2, just nine days into the major league season, Ponce got the call from Pittsburgh that would make his lifelong dream come true, and he made his major league debut that day at the "Friendly Confines."

"The feeling was very nerve-racking, ecstatic, happy, sad, resentful – there were a lot of different emotions going on at once," Ponce said.

He walked out to the mound in the 11th inning and faced the heart of the Cubs lineup, Anthony Rizzo and Javier Baez. With the automatic runner, David Bote, on second base to begin the inning, Ponce recorded the first out of the inning on a long fly ball by Rizzo. He then gave up the winning run on a Baez single and took the loss.



“MENTALLY, I DID SEE IT AS ANOTHER DEBUT BECAUSE MY FAMILY WAS ABLE TO BE IN THE STANDS. I ALSO LOOKED AT IT AS ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY... TO GO OUT THERE AND SHOW OUR FRONT OFFICE AND OUR COACHING STAFF THAT MAYBE I DO BELONG UP HERE.”

**- CODY PONCE,
INDIANAPOLIS INDIANS STARTING PITCHER**

It may not have been the outcome he wanted, but Ponce knew he had accomplished something special.

“I looked up and saw the scoreboards and thought, ‘This is Wrigley Field, this is really happening and I’m about to make my dream come true.’ So that’s when it hit me,” Ponce said. “A lot of people always told me to enjoy the moment, take it all in and try to remember everything you can. I don’t remember a thing, I blacked out in the moment.”

He knew all the blood, sweat and tears had finally paid off, but in a different way than he had dreamed for all those years. The game may have looked and felt the same on-field, but for his debut Ponce was surrounded by a sea of empty seats.

“No one was allowed to be at any of the ballparks,” Ponce said. “It was unfortunate that there was no true debut for me in the sense of [my family being there to support me].”

Ponce made four more appearances with the Pirates in 2020. He earned his first major league win on Aug. 27 at St. Louis, throwing 5.2 scoreless innings in the nightcap of a doubleheader. Each appearance continued to be just as special as his debut, but he was still missing his family in the stands.

When 2021 came around, Ponce began the season with Triple-A Indianapolis and was recalled by Pittsburgh on May 25 after three games (two starts) with the Indians. The Cubs were in town that night, and he was slated to make his fourth career major league start and second against the team that handed him his first loss. This time the stadium gates were open and there were fans – including Ponce’s family – in the PNC Park seats.

“It was unfortunate not having my family there in 2020 but I was able to, in a sense, have my debut again this year,” Ponce said. “I was able to have my dad and grandmother there.”

It wasn’t a perfect outing. Ponce gave up four runs in five innings of work and ultimately took the loss, but the emotions were still the same.

“Mentally, I did see it as another debut because my family was able to be in the stands,” Ponce said. “I also looked at it as another opportunity... to go out there and show our front office and our coaching staff that maybe I do belong up here.”

After a summer of playing in empty stadiums, Ponce finally got to experience what it’s like to play in an energetic major league stadium. For anyone else, that might have fulfilled the dreams they had manifested in their mind.

For Ponce, something – someone – was still missing. The one person he wanted to call and celebrate his dream coming true with, the one person he wanted to hug: his mother, Jennifer, who passed away on Dec. 1, 2017, after being diagnosed with Stage 4 brain cancer.

Every day Ponce walks out to the mound and digs his cleat into the clay, he knows his mother is right there with him cheering him on.

“Every night I get to start I take her out on the mound with me,” Ponce said. “I put a cross in the back of the mound with my mother’s initials. I know she’s always there watching me... she’s always with me.”

Knowing his family is always supporting him and having his mother with him spiritually through it all, Ponce continues to put his best foot forward every time he steps on the mound. Whether it’s in front of an empty stadium or packed house, baseball is still a matter of balls and strikes.

“It’s still sixty feet, six inches to throw the ball over the plate,” Ponce said.

Cody Ponce’s dream may not have been exactly what he imagined, but when he walked out to the mound at Wrigley Field on that rainy August afternoon, it was exactly where he was supposed to be. His dream became reality, and he continues to live it every day. ♥



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