

FROM LONGVIEW BABE RUTH ALL-STAR TO PROFESSIONAL UMPIRE



By Sam Barbee

Ten years ago, Longview-Kelso hosted its third 13-15 World Series, Babe Ruth League's highest profile championship. The co-host Longview was successful in the 2004 championship, reaching the quarterfinals.

Now a decade later, one of the members of that Longview team is making his way through professional baseball, wearing a mask and a chest protector to work. But he's not a catcher, as he also wears a collared shirt and slacks. Kyle McCrady is in his third year as a professional umpire.

Kyle grew up in Longview. His father, Mark, was mayor of Longview in the early 2000s and Kyle attended Mark Morris High School, the same school as Bud Black, as well as Lower Columbia College.

At LCC, McCrady was an outfielder after his stellar playing career at Mark Morris. Under former head baseball coach Kelly Smith, McCrady learned about baseball, where he was an above-average outfielder, and also learned some invaluable life lessons.


"I think it's more, it's not so much about baseball as it is about life," McCrady said from San Bernardino in June. "When I was playing at LCC, it was more than just baseball. Kelly Smith taught us about life, what it means to be responsible, what it means to be accountable, and what it means to tell the truth."

Once his playing days were over, McCrady looked for a way to stay in the game. That's when Tim Hayes, a local umpire and a member of the 2014 Babe Ruth World Series umpiring crew, suggested that McCrady try out umpiring and earn some extra money while he worked on his Bachelor's degree at Washington State University (Vancouver).

So McCrady did, and "just kind of fell in love with it." After three years of working local high school, Babe Ruth and Cal Ripken games, he ran into someone who had attended umpire school in Vero Beach, Florida, and suggested that McCrady also attend.

"After I met him, I knew that I wanted to go to umpire school. I can do that," McCrady said.

So he did, attending the Florida school in winter 2013.



Kyle came back to Longview briefly in 2013, where I had an opportunity to work with him, umpiring local youth games. Shortly after in spring 2013, Kyle was given an assignment to go down to Arizona and work the Rookie League. He was there four days when he was promoted to the Northwest League (short season A ball) where he spent the remainder of the 2013 season.

This season, McCrady was promoted to the California League (long season A ball). A known disadvantage to playing in the minor leagues is the mind-numbing amounts of travel, and umpires are not exempt from that. Working in a two-man crew, McCrady and his partner worked 28 straight days before the All-Star break, with driving distances varying from all night to a few hours.

“We’ve been out here for almost three months now,” McCrady said of the grueling schedule. “And you’re doing the same thing...day after day after day and pretty soon it becomes a grind and you’re like, ‘What am I doing out here?’

“So you focus on every single day and when there are times and you’re like, ‘I don’t want to go to work today,’ you just gotta fight through that.”

Admittedly, it is easy for life on the road to consume people. It’s not for everybody. Months away from friends and family can skew the decision-making process for some guys and they end up in a different place than they started.

“This is one of the weirdest things about the job: we’re on the road all the time and it’s easy to get sucked in to certain lifestyles and it’s easy for the game to change you as a person and for you to lose yourself,” McCrady said.

So how does Kyle stay true to himself? “By maintaining my physical, mental and spiritual self on a daily bases,” he said.

Despite the heavy travel demands and difficult lifestyle, McCrady has fallen in love with the game. His love of the game as a player has only gotten deeper since he put on the iconic grey slacks. In fact, this reporter also played baseball and recently transitioned to umpiring and had the same experience. Being around baseball is the payoff.

“I love my job,” McCrady finally said. “I won’t ever quit. Not that I won’t ever quit, but where I am in my life right now, this is what I want to do with my job.”