

Lefty from Cincy

Southpaw Brent Suter averages nearly a strikeout per inning.

AS A BOY growing up in the Queen City, Brent Suter '12 had an idol: the Cincinnati Reds' Ken Griffey Jr., the speedy, power-hitting center fielder who retired last year after 22 seasons with 630 home runs, and who is a lock for the Hall of Fame. Like Griffey, Suter graduated from Archbishop Moeller High School, a parochial school that is a statewide athletic powerhouse. "I liked Junior's [Griffey's] swing, his ability to make plays in the outfield," Suter says. "He seemed relaxed, just a really cool guy." Suter's Harvard uniform number is 24, the number Griffey wore when he played for the Seattle Mariners at the start of his career.

Today, however, Suter looks to other role models: Randy Johnson, Andy Pettite, and Cliff Lee—all elite left-handed pitchers. A six-foot, five-inch, 215-pound southpaw, Suter has had considerable success retiring collegiate batsmen. In its preseason forecast, College Baseball Insider website named him the Ivy pitcher whom hitters least want to face and ranked him among the league's top three

starters. Last year, Suter was one of only two starting pitchers named to the all-Ivy First Team, and in one sparkling 33-inning stretch, he went a league-best 4-0 with one save and a 3.55 earned run average (ERA), while striking out 33 batters. Left-handed hitters were almost helpless against him, recording only two hits in 24 at-bats for an .083 batting average. Understandably, he still cherishes a dream he's had since childhood: playing in the majors.

There's currently one Harvard-educated pitcher in the big leagues: right-handed reliever Frank Herrmann '06, who had a creditable 2010 rookie year with the Cleveland Indians, posting a 4.03 ERA across 40 appearances. A generation ago, southpaw Jeff Musselman '85 (see "The Dow of Professional Sports," September-October 2001, page 39) pitched five seasons for the

Blue Jays and Mets from 1986 to 1990. The Crimson has sent only five players to the majors since 1943, and only one Harvardian, infielder Eddie Grant, A.B. 1906, LL.B. 1909, played in a World Series, alongside Christy Mathewson and Jim Thorpe for the New York Giants in 1913 (see "Soldier, Scholar, Athlete," November-December 1993, page 83).

Suter throws a fastball, change-up, and curve. The lefty's heater typically zips in at 88 or 89 miles per hour and tops out in the 90 to 91 mph range. He's getting better velocity with age, as he grows stronger and improves in stamina; this allows him to maintain the pop on his fastball throughout a game. "I'm a late bloomer," he says, explaining that he arrived at Harvard as a 175-pound string bean, but has added about 40 pounds thanks to natural growth and weight work. His height provides

leverage and increases the whip of his throwing arm, and simply releasing the ball one or two feet nearer the plate is worth another one or two miles per hour. And he



Brent Suter at O'Donnell Field

A Pitcher's Grips

To throw the two-seam fastball, which has more spin and hence moves more, Brent Suter aligns his second and third fingers along the seams at the point where they are closest together. He grips the four-seam fastball, which goes faster but moves less, with the same fingers perpendicular to a seam where they are more widely spaced. The curve-ball grip puts the index and third fingers together alongside one seam, which imparts the heavy spin that curves the ball's path when the hurler "snaps" it off at the release. The change-up grip is similar to the two-seam fastball, but with pressure applied by the third and fourth fingers and the ball resting deeper in the hand, touching the palm.



works on mechanics, aiming to keep batters from seeing the ball until it is leaving his hand: that diminishes the hitter's reaction time, making a pitcher "sneaky fast."

Actually, Suter throws two kinds of fastball, the two-seam and four-seam, differentiated by his grip on the ball (see sidebar.) The four-seamer travels straighter and a couple of miles per hour faster: it's a good pitch to try when a batter has two strikes, because the extra gas can blow the ball by a hitter for a strikeout. And Suter is a strikeout pitcher: last year he fanned 47 in 49.2 innings pitched, while posting a 4.2 record with a 5.26 ERA. As a freshman he whiffed 53 in as many innings.

Nonetheless, the ability "to throw off-speed pitches for strikes is a big separator," Suter says. Any baseball hurler worth his salt can pound the strike zone with fastballs, but if that's his only pitch, hitters will begin to "sit on" (expect) the fastball and tee off on it. Hence the importance of off-speed pitches like Suter's curve and change-up, which move differently from the fastball and arrive at the plate at a different speed. His "out pitch" is his change-up: thrown with the same motion as the fastball, but with a grip that nestles the ball in the palm of the hand, the change-up may travel eight to 12 mph slower than the fastball, fool-

ing the batter into swinging ahead of the pitch.

Suter gets plenty of outs throwing a change on, say, an 0-1 count, making the batter top the ball for a groundout. When hitters put the ball in play, Suter gets about half his outs from groundouts and half from fly balls. "You strive for ground-ball outs," he says. "Especially with metal bats [which make balls carry farther than wooden ones], you want to keep the ball out of the air. And you always want to miss the barrel of the bat." ~CRAIG LAMBERT



Visit harvardmag.com/ extras to see a video of Brent Suter pitching.

Historic Hoops Season

On the regular season's final weekend, the Harvard men's basketball team overpowered perennial Ivy League top dogs Penn and Princeton to win the Crimson's first-ever Ivy championship. By pacifying the Quakers, 79-64, and taming the Tigers, 79-67, the Crimson men capped off the first 100 years of hoops at the College in the most satisfying manner: Harvard and Princeton shared the 2011 Ivy title with 12-2 records after the Tigers ended their season three days later with a victory at Penn.

Harvard had been the only college not to win a men's Ivy basketball title since the league began in 1956, and the quest for a championship had become a sort

of Holy Grail among Crimson hoopsters and their fans. (The Harvard women, in contrast, have captured 11 Ivy titles.) That's why the season-ending home game against Princeton on Saturday night, March 5, was literally the biggest basketball game in Harvard's history, and sold out weeks in advance. ESPN provided national coverage, and the *New York Times* touted the contest beforehand.

The game lived up to all its hype. In an electrifying first half that saw 18 lead changes and the score tied nine times, Harvard battled to a 37-36 lead by half-time. In the second half, the Crimson gradually took over the game as the pumped-up crowd made the small gym

thunder with cheers. At the final buzzer, hundreds of Harvard students charged out of the stands to mob their team.

A week later, in another thrilling contest, the same two teams met in the Yale gym for a one-game playoff to determine which of the Ivy co-champions would have the league's automatic entry into the NCAA postseason tournament. This one went down to the wire: the Crimson led by a point with only 2.8 seconds remaining, but the Tigers hit a buzzer-beating shot (videotape review required) to win, 63-62. Thus Harvard's postseason play was in the National Invitation Tournament (NIT) rather than the NCAA March Madness. Oklahoma State bested the Crimson, 71-54, in the NIT's first round. (Kentucky dispatched Princeton, 59-57, in the first round of the NAAs.)

The team's 23 victories are the most in the history of the program; the 23-7 overall mark (including postseason) topped last year's 21-8. The Crimson's record of 14-0 at Lavietes Pavilion set a new record for home wins. Forward Keith Wright '12 was elected Ivy League Player of the Year and named to the All-Ivy First Team, while the National Association of Basketball Coaches honored head coach Tommy Amaker as its All-District Coach of the Year for District 13. The triumphant 14-man squad will lose no seniors in May, and has only three juniors. In a column on Harvard's landmark season-ending weekend, the *Boston Globe's* Bob Ryan concluded, "Harvard is coming, and Harvard will not be stopped."



Standout players Kyle Casey (30) and Keith Wright (44) in action as Harvard, in its final home game, beat Princeton, 79-67 to clinch a share of the Ivy League championship