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Seattle Mariners draft two Golden Grizzlies

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

The **Seattle Mariners** selected former Golden Grizzlies Jared Thomas and David Viane in the 11th and 20th rounds, respectively, in the 2002 Major League Baseball Draft on June 4.

Thomas, a 6-foot-3, 225-pound left-handed pitcher, led the nation much of the season in strikeouts and finished with 13.1 strikeouts per nine innings pitched. The Clarkston native started in 12 of his 16 appearances with OU, finished with a 4-4 record and led the team with a 4.82 ERA. Thomas, a junior, was named All-Mid-Continent Conference first team and Newcomer of the Year after compiling a 3-1 record and 3.78 ERA in conference play.

Viane, a 6-1, 215-pound right-handed pitcher, is a converted catcher and senior transfer from Bowling Green, Ohio. He started in 10 of his 20 games and finished 0-1 with a 4.68 ERA and 10.4 strikeouts per nine innings pitched. In his final three outings, Viane's fastball was clocked as high as 93 miles per hour. He also hit .296 with one home run and five RBI in 27 at-bats.

OU baseball coach Mark Avery said Seattle will probably assign both players to the Class A Everett Aqua Sox in Everett, Wash.

"I think Thomas has a better chance at making the big leagues as a starter, and Viane's best chance would be as a set-up reliever," Avery said. "Both players came into our program with a commitment to work hard and it paid off for them. They were far and away the hardest working guys on my team last year."

Thomas led all pitchers in NCAA Division I in strikeouts per nine innings last season until the final game of the year, Avery said.

"Thomas' strikeouts are a big indicator of how he'll do at the next level," Avery said. "He has a hard breaking ball, good control and a fastball that moves from left to right. Throwing from the left side with that kind of movement causes some havoc for hitters."

"Viane has a phenomenal arm. When he came to OU, we converted him to a pitcher and he threw at about 85 to 86 miles per hour. He hurt his hamstring about seven weeks ago, but during the last week of the season he threw at about 92-93. If he had been healthy all year, he would have been taken in an earlier round in the draft. Viane throws very hard, his ball stays down at the knees and it explodes on hitters. He's built a lot like (Cleveland Indians starter) Bartolo Colon. Viane has a slow delivery and his ball just jumps on a hitter."

OU's baseball program is gaining more attention than ever from major league teams, which benefits the baseball program as much as it does the players, Avery said.

"The attention we're getting really helps with recruiting. Because players see that if they come to Oakland our program can put them in the right direction and give them a chance to move on to the next level," Avery said. "In my first year here (1999), I didn't receive a single letter of interest from a scout. Now all the major-league teams send letters."

"Thomas and Viane won't be the last two OU players to be drafted. I have a good corps of hard-throwing pitchers on the team."

Five former OU baseball players have professional baseball contracts. Last April, catcher Chuck Van Robays signed with the Baltimore Orioles after playing two seasons with the Johnstown Johnnies, an independent team in Johnstown, Pa. Van Robays was assigned to the Class A Bluefield Orioles, but subsequently re-signed with Johnstown, and is currently batting .333 with no home runs and 10 RBI after 10 games.

In the 2001 MLB Draft, the Atlanta Braves drafted right-hander Adam Sokoll in the 21st round. Sokoll was 2-3 with a 6.21 ERA for the rookie league Danville Braves last season. He now pitches for the River City Rascals, an independent team in O'Fallon, Mo. He has pitched in one game thus far for River City and has no record.

Seattle drafted left-hander Erick Swanson in the 12th round of the 2000 MLB Draft. Swanson now plays for the Schaumburg Flyers, an independent team in Schaumburg, Ill. In eight games this season, he has a 1-1 record and a 1.93 ERA.

For a Golden Grizzlies 2002 baseball season recap, statistics, team roster and archived stories, visit the **OU Athletics** Web site.

SUMMARY

The Seattle Mariners selected former Golden Grizzlies pitchers Jared Thomas and David Viane in the 11th and 20th rounds, respectively, in the 2002 Major League Baseball Draft on June 4. OU's baseball program is gaining more attention than ever from major league teams, which benefits the baseball program as much as it does the players. Five former OU baseball players have professional baseball contracts.

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