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## Baltimore Orioles sign former OU athlete

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Chuck Van Robays, an Oakland University graduate and former player for the **Golden Grizzlies baseball team**, signed a one-year contract with the Baltimore Orioles on Feb. 24. Van Robays, a 24-year-old catcher who bats and throws right-handed, was assigned to the **Bluefield Orioles** in Bluefield, W. Va., a Class A team in the Appalachian League.

Van Robays played for OU from 1998-2000. In his final season, he hit .329 with 2 HR and 42 RBI and was selected for the All Mid-Con Conference first team. He also was named team MVP and received the Golden Grizzly Leadership Award. This award was renamed the Chuck Van Robays Leadership award in his honor.

After graduating from OU, Van Robays played two seasons with the Johnstown Johnnies, an independent team in the Frontier League. In 78 games last season, he batted .323 with 1 HR and 31 RBI.

OU baseball coach Mark Avery, a former minor-league catcher who also played independent league baseball, said the experience Van Robays gained at Johnstown helped him gain the opportunity to sign a professional contract.

"If Chuck hadn't played in the Frontier League, he would've been out of baseball for two seasons," Avery said. "I almost lived the same situation myself that Chuck is going through now. There's a difference between independent ball and the minor leagues. When a player spends two seasons playing independent ball, you know he's dedicated because there's 1,000 kids trying for maybe five spots in a professional organization.

"I know the time he spent playing and working in the weight room over the last two seasons has helped him develop his skills. He's an outstanding defensive catcher and has big league abilities, including a strong and accurate throwing arm. He'll advance depending on how he hits."

Avery first met Van Robays at a catcher-only baseball camp in Harper Woods when he was just 12 years old and watched him develop into a 6-foot-4, 225-pound player.

"I watched him grow up," Avery said. "He always had great skills, but was skinny and small. When no one wanted him out of high school I gave him a chance. He worked very hard to develop his strength. It's great to see that all his hard work has finally paid off."

Van Robays is OU's third former baseball player to sign a professional contract. The Atlanta Braves selected right-handed pitcher Adam Sokoll in the 2001 Major League Baseball draft, and the Seattle Mariners selected left-handed pitcher Erick Swanson in the 2000 draft. Avery said the signings reflect the time those athletes put into developing their skills.

"None of those kids came in as highly touted athletes," Avery said. "Each of them came into our program and worked very hard. The fact that they now have professional contracts is a testament to their effort."

### SUMMARY

Chuck Van Robays, an OU graduate and former player for the Golden Grizzlies baseball team, recently signed a one-year contract with the Baltimore Orioles and was assigned to the Bluefield Orioles in Bluefield, W. Va., a Class A team in the Appalachian League. Van Robays played for OU from 1998-2000. In his final season, he hit .329 with 2 HR and 42 RBI and was selected for the All Mid-Con Conference first team.

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