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"Ivy Leaguer" Shines For Two Perth Clubs

Ruppert A Steady Contributor

By Dan Vaughan / Perth Heat

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(James Worsfold-SMP)

PERTH - The Ivy League is home to some of the world's highest rated academic institutions. The group of eight schools are known as some of the most sought after university diplomas in the world. Future CEO's, leaders of nations and the movers and shakers that shape societies around the globe exit every year with cap and gown ready to change the world.

The Alcohol. Think Again Perth Heat with the help of the South Perth Cubs of the WA State League also reached into the Ivy League this season to pluck out a difference maker in baseball in Western Australia. Meet Nick Ruppert Dartmouth class of 2016.

When the spring roster was put together, Ruppert was not on the radar for a spot in the outfield rotation for the Heat. The California native had come to Australia under the plan to be the South Perth Cubs big import addition for 2016-2017. In a familiar case of who you know, that has repeated itself time and time again out west the dominoes all fell in place to land Ruppert in Perth.

"I played for Brooke Knight with the Corvallis Knights the summers after my freshman and sophomore years and I know he has a history out here," said Ruppert on his relationship with the former Heat skipper. "One of our coaches (at Dartmouth) was former Heat pitcher Tyler Anderson, and he is a South Perth boy."

It was Anderson, who approached Ruppert about continuing his career after college and Ruppert used Brooke Knight as a reference. Both endorsements helped land Ruppert with the Cubs that would eventually open the pathway to the Heat. When he heard that South Perth was already training Ruppert came to Australia early in the middle of August a month and a half before most imports arrive for the State League competition.

"The first two months I just was around the ballpark and really took a lot of time to hash through some things out that I struggled with in college in terms of my hitting approach, my posture and general bat path and I built up some confidence for myself there," said Ruppert.

A solid spring and a great debut weekend in round one solidified Ruppert as an everyday part of the Heat plans. For Perth he recorded the team's first base hit, a double to left center field against Melbourne and their ace Mark Hamburger and scored the team's first run of the year in the same game. He got off to the best start of any Heat hitter not named Luke Hughes going 5-for-17 despite missing one game due to his commitment with South Perth. Ruppert saw his six game hitting streak snapped during game two of the doubleheader last weekend against Adelaide but went 7-for-20 during that span and owns the second longest streak of the year for Perth to Hughes and his seven game he had snapped also during the same game.

Ruppert is third on the club in average with a .283 clip and tied for second in RBI's with six. His .400 on base percentage is good for third on the club and his nine walks are second behind Hughes with 12. In the ABL he is ninth in both walks and OBP tied with Ronald Acuna the speedy import from Melbourne in OBP.

Yet, while Ruppert remains part of the Heat he got his off to an impressive start for the Cubs and has never looked back. He leads South Perth with five home runs and is second in RBI's with 15. Ruppert is a perfect three for three (tied for team lead) in stolen

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bases and has a team leading .475 OBP.

"I got a few game opportunities early on (with the Cubs) and I did pretty well and luckily Matty (Manger Matt Kennelly) gave me the opportunities in preseason and I have been with the Heat ever since" said the former Dartmouth Big Green star.

It is the norm for most Heat players to play in the state league and once in a while you will see them move up to the Heat for a round or two as was the case last week with veteran slugger Brandon Dale. Last weekend manager Matt Kennelly and hitting coach Luke Hughes played for their state league clubs in the Braves and Morley respectively.

The Cubs under the direction of Rod Drew, who also serves as Head Groundskeeper for the Ballpark in Thornlie, were in action at Victoria Park on Sunday. A day after Ruppert helped the Heat split the double header with the Bite by delivering game tying RBI single in game one he stepped up for the Cubs and hit a big extra inning home run to help South Perth to a win a 5-1 win. He drove in two with his homer and another three for the Heat over the weekend.

Ruppert has taken over a permanent spot in the outfield rotation. He began the year playing mostly center but with Tim Kennelly now available for the road series he has moved to right field. Ruppert has also played left field and has played solid defence in the outfield.

It has been a challenge on road trips, where Ruppert has only been able to play three games in two of the four game road series and head back to Perth before the team does for his South Perth commitments on Sundays.

"After the weekend I am pretty spent but at the end of the day once you get into the game I don't really think about that. You just get into game mode and that is what I love to do is play games and I am really enjoying it. I am very happy with the opportunity I have been given," said Ruppert.

One of the great advantages of playing sports in the USA is the chance to also earn a university degree. For Ruppert he took the route many players take but with the added bonus of attending one of the top colleges academically in the world. The level of education was a big part of his plans and something that was stressed to him early on. The chance to parlay his baseball talent into a top level education that might not have been there if not for baseball helped him make his college decision.

"My parents really stressed life opportunities and the importance of education and it is what eventually became my determining factor in going to Dartmouth."

Ruppert comes from a baseball oriented family and it has been in his blood from the beginning. His grandfather the late Henry Steinriede played AAA ball for the Detroit Tigers and was a scout for the Cincinnati Reds for 25 years during the "Big Red Machine" heyday.

"I was exposed to baseball at a pretty young age. It has been my main sport and the one that I excelled in the most over the years growing up," added Ruppert.

In a season that so far has not gone as planned chalk Ruppert up as one of the bright surprises for the Heat. Complete with his diploma from Dartmouth he has put changing the world on pause while he tries to help the causes of both the Heat and South Perth.

This story also appeared on our media and broadcast partner [Talking Baseball Australia's](#) site. Please follow the Heat all season long on Talking Baseball Australia and the Sporting Star Network. You will often find bonus content and longer versions of our coverage.

Dan Vaughan makes his return to Perth after spending the last several years away working with the club. He teams up with Paul Morgan as the Heat media team and will join Morgan on air as the Heat play-by-play broadcast due for all home and away games in 16-17. Follow him on twitter @DanVaughanJr. This story was not subject to the approval of the Australian Baseball League or its clubs.