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The bullpen life

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By Cam Ellis

Sports@StarNewsOnline.com

Life for a bullpen pitcher is all about uncertainty. It's not out of the question to throw three pitches one night, then turn around and pitch three innings the following night. It's a role that can be exhausting, mentally and physically. Coley Thompkins, a right-handed pitcher at Campbell University, knows the role better than most, beginning his third season out of the bullpen for the Camels, a season with sky-high expectations.

The secret to his success? It's all in the routine.

"That's obviously the biggest challenge, being prepared," said Thompkins, a 2011 high school All-State selection from Hoggard. "What I usually do is spend the first three to five innings cheering from the dugout. Around the fifth inning, I have a routine where I'll head down (to the bullpen) and separate myself. I'll start to go through my stretches and warmup routine. Then, I'm on standby."

After making only three appearances his freshman year, Thompkins expanded his role as a sophomore, finishing with a 1-0 record and 1.62 ERA over 16.2 innings for a Campbell team that set a school record by winning 49 games. The Camels didn't win the Big South Conference Tournament, however, and subsequently were left out of the NCAA tournament.

Coming into the 2014 season, expectations are once again high for the Camels.

They're returning Big South preseason pitcher of the year Ryan Thompson, a dynamic closer who will anchor a Campbell bullpen that Thompkins describes as one of the team's main strengths.

"Our bullpen is definitely going to be a huge key to another successful season," Thompkins said. "We've got Ryan coming back, and our bullpen should revolve around him. We're going to try and lock it down, so that once the starter leaves the game, the game is over. In the past, we've had success with that."

The Camels have improved their schedule this year, playing N.C. State and North Carolina. For Thompkins though, the biggest game comes Tuesday, April 8, when the Camels travel to Brooks Field to take on his hometown UNCW Seahawks.

"Growing up, I spent countless hours at Brooks Field. My family was season ticket holders, and that was where I really fell in love with baseball. I'm expecting a lot of family and friends to be there for that game. It's going to be a big day for me, and it's been a game I've been looking forward to since I came to Campbell. Hopefully I get a few innings there."

As for his role this upcoming season, Thompkins is flexible, ready for the uncertainty that comes with the job. He worked this offseason on his conditioning, as well as refining his secondary pitches.

"I'm expecting my workload to increase," Thompkins said, "I'm not sure what that means numbers-wise, but I'm ready to throw as many games as possible. Seeing limited action my freshman year, I learned how to contribute in any way possible,



Campbell University/Bennett Scarborough
Former Hoggard High School standout Coley Thompkins will be a key part of the Campbell baseball bullpen this spring.

and that's what's most important. There are many roles I have to play."

While Thompkins' role could change throughout the marathon that is the college baseball season, there is one aspect he believes will remain steady: his entrance song. While some pitchers choose to go with heavy metal or rap, in order to get their adrenaline pumping, Thompkins decided to take another route.

"A lot of times, when I enter the game, there tend to be men on base," Thompkins said of Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds."

"I like the song because it let's people know not to worry. Every little thing is going to be all right."

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