

# So you want to be a big leaguer...

By Mike Christensen

Drew Waters, an outfielder for the Mississippi Braves, was drawn to baseball at an early age in Woodstock, Georgia.

"My older brother was a player, so I played. All the time," he said. He played football and basketball, too, until he reached middle school, when he chose to stick to baseball.

"I could compete in baseball half the year," he said. "My friends all played, and that was fun. But at the end of the day, I was looking to compete."

Driven to excel, he did. He became a star at Etowah High School and one of the best players in Georgia, a baseball hotbed. A lifelong Atlanta Braves fan, he realized a dream when the Braves drafted him in the second round of the 2017 amateur draft. He signed a lucrative contract days later and, at age 20, already has reached Double-A, the pivotal level of the minor leagues.

Waters has obvious natural abilities, but the secret to his success is more than God-given talent. His advice to kids with a dream like his: Get to work.

"If your team is practicing two or three times a week, that's not enough to get better," he said. "To hone your skills, you can't just practice twice a week. I feel like you only get better



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as a player from your work outside of practice."

Run, throw, lift, hit in a cage.

"You need to do it to get better," he said. And if you truly love the game, it won't feel like work.

Realize, too, that in baseball, there will be tough times, Waters said. "You just flush it. Focus on the next at-bat, the next game. Don't carry it with you."

Daniel Lockhart, an M-Braves infielder, has a story that only slightly differs from Waters'. Lockhart's father,

Keith, was a major league player from 1994-2003, including some time with the Atlanta Braves.

"I grew up with baseball," said Daniel Lockhart, who was born in Tennessee but grew up in Georgia and went to high school there. "I've been all about baseball since I could talk. That was all I could focus on. Baseball was always important for me."

He got to hang around big league clubhouses occasionally and received pointers from his father but also from his mom, who worked with him when

his dad was in season. Like Waters, he was driven to get better—and a big part of that, Lockhart said, is just staying positive.

"You gotta know baseball is a sport of failure," he said. "You go 3-for-10, that's good. Don't focus on the seven outs. Stay positive. It's a sport that's filled with failure even for the best players. When you have a rough day, pick out something from the game you can be positive about. That keeps it fun."

Lockhart, 26, is not a highly rated prospect like Waters -- and his progress in pro ball has not been as seamless -- but his goal is the same: Make the major leagues. And his desire is beyond question.

"Until the bat is taken out of my hands, I'm going to play," Lockhart said. "I'm not thinking about anything else. ... You can't look too far ahead in this game. I want to enjoy the moment, enjoy where I'm at."

As the old scout says in the movie *Moneyball*, "We're all told we can no longer play the children's game. Some of us are told at 18, some of us are told at 40. But we're all told." Until that day comes, a couple of M-Braves will tell you, keep playing, keep working and keep thinking positive.

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