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Valentine Named 'Best Pitcher' During Prague Baseball Week

6/25/10

Grace College's Christopher Valentine earned the Best Pitcher of the Tournament Award for his performance during Prague Baseball Week in Prague, Czech Republic. He became the first American to win the prestigious award and helped lead the USA to their first ever title in the tournament.

Valentine pitched two complete games against Croatia and Israel, earning two significant victories that helped springboard Team AIST (American International Sports Teams) into the championship game where the Americans captured the title with a 7-1 victory over the Russians.

"The team just came together from the get-go," said Team AIST head coach Frank Sims, who has been taking American players to compete in Europe for nine years. "There was great teamwork, and all of the players knew we were striving win the tournament for the USA. That, in itself, was great motivation. We won with great pitching, strong defense and timely hitting."

The Lancers' rising sophomore earned the start in America's first game of the tournament against Croatia and pitched all nine innings. After trailing by three runs through three innings, the Americans caught fire at the plate, and Valentine's perseverance helped lead the USA to a 9-6 victory, his first international win.

With only three days of rest, Valentine pitched another nine-inning game in America's 10-2 win over Israel. His longevity on the mound was crucial to the team's success with only six pitchers on the roster.

The team's only loss was on the second day, when they fell to the Russians 6-5. The Americans, however, went on to defeat Austria and two Czech teams before meeting Russia, once again, in the championship.

"His opening game got us going, and we did not have to use any other pitchers that day," Sims continued. "That was huge because pitching was thin to begin with. Christopher's win against Israel was also big because it was the first game on Saturday, and we had to win three games in one day to have a chance to win it all."

Team AIST consisted of 16 players from 11 different schools around the nation. Before this year's championship, they had taken home three second-place finishes and one third-place finish. Harvard University's Matthew Vance (short stop) also became the first American to win the MVP of the Tournament.

Valentine's and Vance's awards were presented by Haim Katz, the President of the International Association of Baseball (IAB).

In 2007, ESPN's Jim Cagle ranked Prague Baseball Week as one of the top 10 "Don't Miss" baseball experiences.

Valentine also pitches locally for the Tigers in the Indiana Regional Mexican Summer League, and as a freshman at Grace, he had a 4.14 ERA, the lowest on the team, and struck out 21 batters.



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