

Nathan Aron: Rustler, Ace, Yankee



Cheltenham firsts player **Nathan Aron** spent a bit of his summer back home in Melbourne playing with the inaugural squad of the Melbourne Aces in the resurrected ABL. He's also one of the few Aussie talents to be signed to a professional US contract to play the sport he loves; and he's doing it a long way from home with the parent club New York Yankees' Rookie league affiliate team, the Gulf Coast Yankees.

All young baseball players who sign US contracts start the long road to their dream of playing in The Show by beginning in the lower levels of the minor league system and Nathan is no exception. There is

no such thing as a quick route into the Majors, and for young hungry players it all starts in Rookie ball or Single A ball, quite a distance from the glamour and the cash of the 'Bigs'.

Nathan spent some time last year learning his trade with the GCL Yankees in the Gulf Coast league, a rookie ball league which operates in Florida with a 60 game season.

It's a tough gig, but an exciting one which those who have the chance to experience wouldn't trade for anything.

So, the Chelt website caught up with Nathan and asked him a few questions in order to get a feeling for what it's like over in the US playing baseball for a living. Nathan, ever the gentleman, was happy to oblige.



Chelt Website: So, let's go back a bit, how did you feel about getting signed?

Nathan: Well, it was a dream come true. I had just had an elbow operation, so I wasn't sure if I was even going to play, but all the hard work paid off and I was able to sign that professional contract.

Chelt Website: Can you describe what you did, where you went, when you first went over to the US?

Nathan: My first year was spent in Tampa, Florida where I completed my first Spring Training and Rookie Ball season with the GCL Yankees. However, while I was in the US I was able to travel a little bit and see some professional games.



Chelt Website: *How has it been playing with the GCL Yankees? How have they treated you?*

Nathan: Well, my first season was interrupted with tendonitis in both my wrists, but I enjoyed my time while I was there and gained a lot of information about the game, which has helped me mature not only as a player, but as a person as well. The organisation was very welcoming and the staff and players were more than friendly, which helped the transition of living away from home.

Chelt Website: *How do they feel about Aussie baseballers over there?*

Nathan: I was lucky this year to play against some Aussies, so I think it's a good thing that Aussie baseballers are overseas, whether that be in Europe or the US. It can only improve the quality of baseball when they come back home and play for their home teams.

Chelt Website: *What do you miss about Australia?*

Nathan: I probably miss the home cooked meals the most, besides friends and family.

Chelt Website: *What's the best thing about living in the US?*

Nathan: I would say that the best thing about living in the US would be the cultural lifestyle, as it very different to Australia, with different cultures and languages spoken.

Chelt Website: *Can you tell us a bit about playing pro-ball? What are the upsides and downsides?*

Nathan: Well, my experience so far has led me to live in the US for 6 months of the year and I was situated in Tampa. But most of the time in pro-ball is spent training; last year I trained for approximately 4 hours a day for 6 days of the week, as well as games in the afternoon. So there is plenty of practice, which can leave you tired at the end of the day.

Chelt Website: *And what does an average day look like for you?*

Nathan: Days usually started at 7:30am at the field where we would lift weights in the gym for an hour or so or take early batting practice. From there we would train, consisting of stretching, individual defence, team defence, base running and then hitting on the field or in the cages, until around 12pm. Now, for rookie ball and extended spring you will also play a game against a rival team, in our

league that's Phillies, Pirates, Blue Jays, Tigers or Braves. You would travel as a team in a bus.

Chelt Website: *What sort of distances are the bus trips?*

Nathan: In rookie ball, the bus trips are fairly short, varying from 30 minutes to a place like Clearwater up to an hour and 30 minutes to Orlando.

Chelt Website: *And the pitching, how did you find that?*

Nathan: Pitching? Well pitching is a lot faster, with the average fastball being around 90 mph. Pitching is not that different except pitchers have better quality pitches and throw harder.



Chelt Website: *Ok, now to home, how was it playing with the Melbourne Aces?*

Nathan: So far playing for the Aces, it has been all good news. I'm with a great bunch of guys with numerous years of experience. So it's good to speak to them and get a better understanding of the game.

Chelt Website: *Finally, what words of advice can you give to young Aussie kids hoping to follow in your footsteps?*

Nathan: The only advice I can give young kids would be to follow your dreams and have fun. This game is built around failure, so there will be ups and downs. But just remember to have fun.

Thanks Nathan! How good is that? That's a great snapshot of life in the US leagues and the message is pretty clear for our young readers; it's hard work, but worth it.

All of us at the Rustlers wish 'Nayter' all the best in his continuing baseball odyssey in the US and we'll all be following his progress with the greatest interest. Follow Nathan's US exploits in 2011 on our website at Nathan's own page.

Go Nathan!