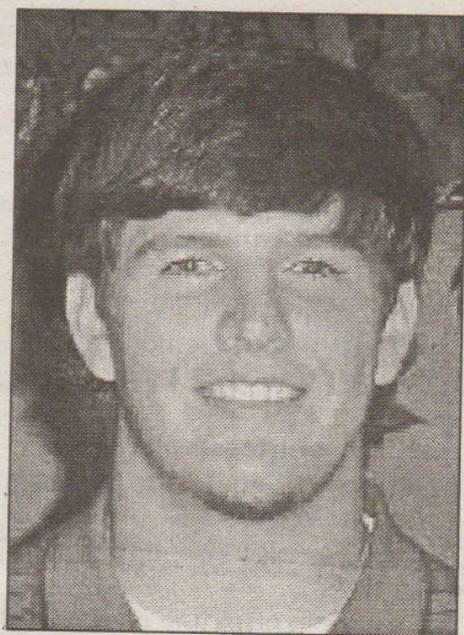


# Georgia closer has Omaha on his mind

By Lee Warren  
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*Will Startup, relief pitcher,  
University of Georgia*

Every season since 1950, Omaha has been the prize for the eight elite college baseball teams in the country. Sports fans turn their attention to Rosenblatt Stadium each June as ESPN broadcasts the College World Series and captures the drama that unfolds on the field. From late inning, game winning, home runs to starting pitchers who throw over a hundred pitches to complete a shut out, the College World Series has it all.

Unlike sports fans, college baseball players start to think about Omaha long before June. Will Startup, a relief pitcher who is entering his junior year at the University of Georgia, is no exception.

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**—Will Startup**

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said. “If I could compare them to another group, it might be Boston Red Sox fans. But the fans were very classy and cheered for good baseball. The residents were always checking on us, making sure that we were enjoying ourselves.”

If Startup sounds like he is well grounded, that’s because he is. He grew up in church.

“My father and mother did a great job of discipling me and my two brothers,” Startup said. “They showed us the love of Jesus and in turn helped influence me to live my life for Jesus.”

He was 12 years old when he fully understood the gospel and placed his faith in Christ. Today, Startup takes his faith with him out to the pitching mound.

“I realize the only reason I can throw a ball at this level is to share my faith with other people,” he said. “[God] also gives me an incredible peace on the mound. I am never nervous. He helps me see things through His eyes and when things go wrong,

“You try not to mention it and just work hard,” Startup said. “I never thought we would be one of the last eight teams but we pulled together as a team and set our minds to it.”

When Startup arrived in Omaha with his Georgia Bulldog team for the 2004 CWS, he liked what he saw.

“Omaha was amazing,” Startup said. “I know that we got to see the city in its best shape because of the CWS coming to town. But everybody was nice and it seemed like the whole city stopped because the CWS was in town. It really reminded me of my hometown downtown area (Cartersville, Georgia). It was a great place to walk around to shop or taste the local flavors.”

He has good things to say about the fans and residents in Omaha too.

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He reminds me that people are watching how I am going to react.”

While this ballplayer put up impressive numbers as Georgia's closer in 2004 (5 Wins, 2 Loses, 8 Saves and a 2.37 ERA), he'd rather talk about the team Bible study he leads.

“The baseball team is my foreign mission field,” Startup said. “I have people from all walks of life on there and everyone, including myself, needs Jesus. But I have seen many guys express interest in Jesus and that gets me very excited.”

The Bulldogs won two games in the CWS before eventually being eliminated by Texas, but Startup hasn't stopped dreaming about Omaha.

“People call it a once in a lifetime experience,” he said, “but I would like to make it a twice in a lifetime experience this year.” †