

McCall: An unlikely path to coaching baseball

It was over. Gerard McCall never thought the day would come. But it did. After one year with the Arizona White Sox minor league baseball team, the organization cut him.



**JOE
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37, is the head varsity baseball coach for the Saint Joseph Bruins. He no longer stoops behind the batter every game. He no longer stands in the batter's box, bat in hand.

Instead, he coaches a talented high school team that just missed playing for the state championship in 2016, a team that this year should be just as strong if not better than the year before.

And while McCall is proud to be in his third year as head coach, the road to Saint Joseph was not entirely smooth.

YOUTH DREAMS

McCall's story began in the early 1990s when he played in the recreational league in his

hometown of Meridian. He was always talented, and would play with children – often his cousins – who were older than he was,

Growing up, sports was everything. The competition motivated him. McCall excelled in baseball, basketball and football. He was so talented that he started on the Meridian High School varsity baseball team as an eighth grader.

And as he found success, word of his talent quickly reached major league scouts. When McCall graduated in 1998, the Chicago White Sox drafted him out of high school in the 13th round. The team then sent the 18-year-old 1,000 miles away from his family to play for the Arizona White Sox.

And he cried. "I thought I had a second chance," McCall remembered. "I absolutely did everything I could possibly do from sun-up to sun-down."

That was 2000. Today in 2017, McCall, now

His first year was a success. McCall was the best-hitting catcher on his team, batting .287. At the same time, he was a young, impressionable teenager far away from his family and constantly facing the threat of being cut at any moment.

“The worst part was you see a whole lot of politics,” McCall said. “You see guys getting moved up for no reason. It’s like you do the best you can, and you don’t get noticed.”

BEST SHAPE

McCall worked hard and was in the best physical shape of his life. And while nothing he did sent him to the majors, he found strength in the one person who had been there with him since the beginning: his mother.

“Probably my biggest fan and my

biggest motivation was my mom. She was the most constant. And she helped not just in athletics, but also in the classroom when I was in school.”

A year after he was cut by the Arizona White Sox, McCall found a spot on the Jackson Senators minor league team – which played at Smith Wills Stadium and offered his family and friends a chance to see him play. By 2005, he had enough. He retired from professional play.

“It got to the point where it wasn’t what I looked forward to,” McCall said. “I just didn’t see myself continuing on the same path. I wanted to do some other things in my life, like start a family. So, I was just ready to move on.”



GERARD
MCCALL

He turned to coaching and landed a spot as an assistant with the Saint Andrew’s Episcopal High School varsity team, where he worked 2002-2014. When the baseball coaching job opened at Saint Joseph, McCall jumped on board.

And that’s when I first met him.

BRUIN EXPERIENCE

McCall had just taken over the program and was hosting a baseball camp at Saint Joseph in July 2013 for fourth, fifth and sixth graders. An avid baseball fan and player, I jumped at the chance.

Even though the camp didn’t start until 8 a.m., my dad dropped me off early every day – giving me a chance to talk with McCall before the start of camp. The sun had just risen, the

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– Gerard McCall,
Bruin baseball coach

aroma of freshly mown grass always filled the air and McCall, in his deep, rough, gravelly voice, talked about baseball.

The wisdom he shared about the game I love struck me and caught my attention. McCall knows how to command your attention. He is the kind of coach who gets the best from players. He is the kind of coach

players will go an extra mile to please.

Andrew Sanli, a catcher on the team, agreed: “He wants us to stay motivated and keep the goal in sight of what we’re trying to do: To win the state championship.”

At Saint Joseph, McCall has led the Bruins to two successful seasons in a row, last year advancing to the semifinals of the District 2A playoffs and almost – almost – reaching the state championship.

Now, McCall watches games from the 3rd base coach position, urging his players to success. Every now and then, his thoughts return to his own experiences with professional baseball.

And when he thinks back to that fateful day when he sat on the bed in Scottsdale, Ariz., he no longer cries.

Why? Without that experience, he wouldn’t be where he is today.