

Alex Hermeling adjusts to relief role with Dodgers farm team



Glenbrook North graduate Alex Hermeling is pitching for the Great Lakes Loons in his first minor league baseball season. (Great Lakes Loons / HANDOUT)

By **Heather Rule**
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The game, top of the ninth, bases loaded with one out. Alex Hermeling, a relief pitcher for the minor-league Great Lakes Loons, got the Nos. 3 and 4 hitters for the Lake County Captains to strike out swinging to end the inning.

"It excited everybody," Loons pitching coach Bobby Cuellar said.

The Loons, the Single-A affiliate for the [Los Angeles Dodgers](#), lost the home game 4-3 in 10 innings on Friday, June 3, in Midland, Mich., but Hermeling left his mark.

"That right there shows you that this young man has something in him," said Cuellar, who previously served as the pitching coach for the [Seattle Mariners](#) (1995-96) and [Montreal Expos](#) (1997-2000).

Hermeling, 23, owns a 3.68 ERA through 44 innings in 24 games in his first minor league season. He's struck out 49, walked 20 and held hitters to a .198 batting average. He's also converted five of eight save opportunities and has a 1-3 record.

"Just have to stay positive and keep going," Hermeling said. "I feel like I'm finding myself as a pitcher."

The Dodgers drafted the right-handed Hermeling in the 43rd round in 2011 out of Glenbrook North. Hermeling, who is 6-foot-5 and 230 pounds, signed a minor-league deal last July after pitching at Louisiana-Monroe and with the Battle Creek (Mich.) Bombers of the Northwoods League.

He has great size and a quick arm, Cuellar said.

"The arm speed that he has is something that very few people have," he said.

His best outing of the season, according to Hermeling, was when he was asked to do a spot start on Thursday, May 5, against the Cedar Rapids Kernels. He didn't surrender a hit or a run in four innings of work, struck out five and walked one on 59 pitches with 38 for strikes.

Best outing, indeed.

Hermeling describes himself as a balanced pitcher and his go-to pitch is whatever is working for him on a particular day or what a situation dictates, he said.

The biggest transition for him, other than playing a full, 140-game season in five months, has been adjusting to his role as a relief pitcher. He's been a starting pitcher his whole career. The main difference is he never knows for certain when he'll pitch, "and always having to be ready no matter what the situation dictates," he said.

"It's a whole different animal," Hermeling said. "Whenever your name's called, you have to be ready."

As with many sports, baseball is faster at higher levels. Hermeling has seen this firsthand in the minors. The margin for error decreases and pitchers have to execute their pitches successfully every time, he said.

"If you don't do that and you make a mistake, you're going to be punished for it with a base hit," Hermeling said.

Cuellar said Hermeling is a pleasure to work with, has a good personality and is very attentive. When they're working together, Hermeling will look at Cuellar, think about what was said, try it and look back to ask if that's what Cuellar wanted him to do, according to Cuellar.

Playing professional baseball is a true blessing, Hermeling said, and he never would have thought he'd have the opportunity to play after college. Thinking ahead to pitching on a big-league mound in front of 50,000 fans crosses his mind often, he said, including every day when he and his teammates are in the middle of sprints or intense workouts. It's the end goal.

"You don't know what can change in the future," Hermeling said. "You're always a lot closer than you might think."

Heather Rule is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.

Twitter @hrrule

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