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How an ex-Oregon State quarterback became the Yankees' latest pitching project



Former Oregon State quarterback Chance Nolan signs a minor league contract with the Yankees. (Courtesy of Chance Nolan; AP)



By **GARY PHILLIPS**

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Still adjusting to life as a [Yankee](#), Chance Nolan had no clue that his new team had so many ties to the gridiron.

Plenty of notable football players have been drafted or employed by the Bombers. [The list includes Deion Sanders](#), John Elway, Bo Jackson, George Halas, Russell Wilson, Drew Henson, Daunte Culpepper and Brandon Weeden.

"A lot of quarterbacks," Nolan, hearing this info for the first time, noted during a phone call with the Daily News. "That's crazy. I didn't know they had that history."

Nolan is now part of that group, as Oregon State's former gunslinger inked a minor league contract with the Yanks on Jan. 28. The signing followed a tumultuous few years for the 25-year-old, a period that saw his NFL dreams ripped away before he expeditiously embarked on a path to becoming a professional pitcher.

A three-sport athlete growing up in Menifee, Calif., Nolan stopped playing baseball after his freshman year of high school so that he could prioritize football and, to a lesser extent, basketball. A self-described "late bloomer," he didn't enjoy a growth spurt until his senior year. That meant limited collegiate opportunities in football, but Nolan ended up at Middle Tennessee State.

He redshirted there before transferring to Saddleback College in Mission Viejo, Calif. There, Nolan established himself as a coveted JUCO quarterback. With plenty of offers to choose from this time around, he picked Oregon State.

Nolan had his fair share of success with the Beavers from 2020-2022, throwing for 4,153 yards, 32 touchdowns, 20 interceptions and a 60.8 completion percentage over 22 games. He said some draft grades pegged him as a sixth or seventh-round pick after a strong 2021 campaign, so he decided to stay at Oregon State in hopes of boosting his stock.

Oregon State puts together back-to-back 92-yard touchdown drives before the end of this half. The latest ends with Chance Nolan connecting with Tre'Shaun Harrison for a 36-yard touchdown to give Oregon State a 21-14 lead over USC.

pic.twitter.com/NJkaVL0Clo

— Arash Markazi (@ArashMarkazi)
[September 26, 2021](#)

Instead, Nolan suffered a neck injury and a concussion in the fifth game of his junior season. It would be the last time he played in a football game, though it took some time to cement that decision.

Nolan transferred to TCU for the 2023 season, but he ultimately walked away from the sport after meeting with some Dallas-area doctors. He left the meeting with his eyes watery and his mind clouded.

"Being a football player, being a tough guy, you don't really talk about head injuries," Nolan said. "You just keep it hush-hush. But I was pretty transparent with all the stuff I endured playing football since I was a 7-year-old kid. They put some things into perspective for me. It was one of the hardest conversations I ever had. I left the room crying in tears and really contemplating if this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and what consequences could come from me chasing this dream and this sport that isn't very forgiving. It's pretty dangerous.

"Football is just so competitive and so fierce that when I went out there and realized that I couldn't really do that anymore, I had to step away."

Nolan's choice left him "depressed" at first. But his father, Mark, reminded him

It didn't take long for the right-hander to show promise.

"I was throwing 91, 92," Nolan said, "but I had no mechanics. I was throwing it like a football."

Sullins helped Nolan clean things up a bit. Meanwhile, Nolan's younger brother, Cade, played baseball for Morningside University, a Division II, NAIA school in Sioux City, Iowa. The sibling helped arrange a visit and a bullpen session, which led to Nolan pitching in seven games for the Mustangs in 2024.

The results were erratic, as Nolan totaled nine walks, three strikeouts and a 2.70 ERA over just 3.1 innings.

Nolan acknowledged his rawness at Morningside. He would have liked to have focused more on development, but "they threw me into the fire," he said.

With his baseball interest piqued, however, Nolan found more of what he wanted at Driveline, the data-driven facility in Seattle. Intent on improving his command and velocity, he began training there last September.

By the time Driveline hosted a pro day on Jan. 20, Nolan felt he had progressed at an "excessive" rate. He firmly believed his velocity and four-pitch mix — Nolan throws four-seamers, sinkers, sweepers and changeups — would impress scouts.

He was right.

A number of scouts, including the Yankees' Kendall Carter and Jay Darnell, watched Nolan hit 97 mph that day. Eight days later, he donned pinstripes and a navy NY cap as he put pen to paper on his first professional contract.

The Highlight Reels are here !!
@[chance_nolan](#) pumped some flames
on Saturday sitting 95-97🔥🔥🔥 Need I
say more? Don't expect this guy to be

— Maddux Minton (@MadduxMinton)

January 21, 2025

Nolan also received offers and/or interest from the Mariners, Cubs, Red Sox, Padres and Braves. However, he felt the Yankees' recruitment had a personal feel to it. That included a conversation with Sam Briend, the Yankees' senior director of pitching, about the club's well-regarded pitching development capabilities.

"That really sparked my interest," Nolan said. "And then being in the Yankees organization, it holds a lot more weight than being in another organization."

Nolan declined to say how much he's earning, but it's less than six figures. He did receive a signing bonus, another factor that helped the Yankees stand apart from some of the aforementioned teams.

Nolan ventured to Tampa shortly after signing. With spring training just a few days away, he wasn't invited to big league camp, and he has no idea what minor league level he'll begin his career at. He hopes to start throwing live batting practice in the next few weeks, but he knows the Yankees will move him along slowly given his limited experience.

With that in mind, Nolan's goals for the season are modest. He's focused on continued growth, getting more comfortable on the mound, finding a routine, and logging 50 or so innings for the first time.

"I know this year is gonna be a lot of learning," he said.

Long-term is a different story, though.

"I think that I have the ability to pitch at a super, super high level," Nolan said. "My goals ultimately are, obviously, to pitch on the biggest stages in the big leagues. Whether it's as a starter, a big-time closer, reliever, whatever it is, I want to be at the highest level possible. That's the type of competitor I am."

