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Dave Albee: Novato's Scott is baseball's frequent flyer extraordinaire

HOW'D YOU LIKE to have **Charles Scott's** job? In the past year, he was "fired" from the one he had with the Arizona Diamondbacks, who now have the worst record in baseball. He was then given a new one by the Montreal Expos, who have the second worst record in the National League and are desperately looking for new owners and a new home. In between, Scott's profession in general was demeaned and not deemed particularly worthy in a best-selling book "Moneyball."

You think Scott's got it bad? You've got it all wrong.

Scott, a Marin Sports Hall of Fame athlete out of Terra Linda High, loves his job and will defend it like Dodgers closer Eric Gagne defends a lead. It's Scott's occupation to evaluate young baseball players to determine if they have major league-caliber potential that will ultimately replenish our national pastime. He's very good at it and extremely passionate about it and so committed to it that he even established his own instructional baseball camps in Marin with the e-mail heading of www.futureprospectsbaseball.com.

Last night, Scott attended the Expos game against the Giants, which gave him a chance to catch up with his old Arizona State University friend, teammate and roommate Barry Bonds. Scott, a sixth-round pick by the Cleveland Indians in the 1985 amateur free-agent draft as a pitcher, is now Western Crosschecker for the Expos. In Montreal's media guide, he is listed under "recruiteur amateurs" but he also could be labeled a frequent flyer.

Scott's job with the Expos has taken him as far away from his home in Novato to Topsham, Maine to see 18-year-old right-hander Mark Rogers pitch. Rogers, who was the fifth pick overall in June's draft and received a \$2.3 million signing bonus from the Milwaukee Brewers, hit 98 mph on the radar gun the day Scott saw him. Rogers struck out 158 batters in 63 innings last spring, the most eye-opening production to come out of Maine since the L.L. Bean catalog.

With prospective big-league players tucked away in every corner of this country, travel for any scout is a grind. It can be planes, trains and snowmobiles.

For Scott, it beats the alternative. He was suddenly out of work last year when the Diamondbacks' organization went into a downsizing mode. They decided to eliminate Scott's scouting job as Western Supervisor, a position he had held for three years.

"I was in shock for a week," Scott said. "Obviously they weren't lying. They really were downsizing."

Right into last place in the NL West. Hence, the Diamondbacks have committed to a youth movement and Scott's body of work for the team will have an impact on it in the future, though he no longer works for them. Scott won one last battle in the "war" room in June of 2003 during the draft. He argued emphatically and insisted the team pick Cal infielder Conor Jackson over Arizona center fielder Brian Anderson with its first-round selection, 19th overall. The D'backs did, but only after Anderson was taken by the White Sox with the 15th pick overall.

Jackson is currently hitting .311 with Double A El Paso and last month was selected to play in the

Futures Game, a prestigious Triple A-Double A All-Star contest. Anderson, who's batting .287 at Double-A Birmingham, was not.

"If Brian Anderson is a superstar and in the big leagues someday, you can write it down: I didn't think he'd be," Scott said.

Obviously Scott is not afraid to speak his mind and voice his opinion. That's because he's confident in his ability to recognize big-league talent. That's why the Milwaukee Brewers contacted him three days after the Diamondbacks let him go and why the Expos wanted to hire him without flying him in for an interview.

Scott turned down the Brewers' offer to be a Major League scout on the west coast because they wanted him to relocate to Southern California. Scott and his family are settled in Novato.

The Expos gave Scott essentially the same job he had with Arizona, except he's doing more traveling.

"I get to see a lot more players in different areas," Scott said. "When you take jobs like this, you have to have something higher in mind. It was obviously something good to put on my resume." Scott, who would love someday to be a director of baseball personnel or a general manager, isn't bothered by the Expos' imminent move, probably to Washington, D.C. It's normal for the scouting business to move around and Scott has been led to believe he'll have a contract with the Expos through the 2005 season.

Then again, the Diamondbacks dumped him in an instant.

"I've gone from being at the top (of scouting) to not having a job. It took away a lot of my faith in the industry," Scott said.

But not his belief that the time-tested method of scouting still works. "Moneyball," an account of Billy Beane and the Oakland A's corporate approach to evaluating talent, clashes with the wisdom favored by Scott and his fellow scouts, most of whom have played the game. It emphasizes present-day, statistical insight, with lap-top computer programs doing the work of experienced human beings in the field projecting the future.

"I don't think baseball is doing the right thing getting away from baseball people. The results will really show up down the line ... It's not all based on that friggin' computer," Scott said. "You've got to keep baseball people in baseball. We know. We did it."

They've survived. In a high stakes game like baseball, where so few players persevere to actually play in the big leagues, it takes scouts with the eyes and experience of Scott to best separate prospects from pretenders. It's a risky business and Scott understands that better than anyone. He's the right man for the job.

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