



## Aviators' Cherry Is UNC Bound

Senior signs with Tar Heels, eyes possible first round pick

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VANDALIA — Taylore Cherry is driven to play baseball at the next level. On Wednesday, he came closer to fulfilling that desire by signing with the University of North Carolina.

But there's a catch: The Vandalia-Butler High School senior might not ever set foot on the famed Chapel Hill campus as a student. That's because next June he could be a first-round pick in the Major League Baseball draft.

"As of right now, we don't know what's going to happen," Cherry said among well-wishers and teammates in a signing ceremony at school.

"When it gets a little bit closer at the end of May and early June, then we'll have more of an idea of what my stance on that will be."

Cherry should join Tony Nicely (1977) and Ron Sorey (1974) as the only area high school players to be selected in the first round of the annual draft. Cherry, a right-handed power pitcher, would have to choose between an early start on a pro career or joining one of college baseball's elite programs.

"That's been my dream since I was a little kid, just going to the next level in baseball," he said.

Wednesday was National Signing Day for many sports. Seniors have one week to sign a binding letter of intent to accept a college scholarship. National Signing Day for football is Feb. 1, 2012.

At 6 feet 9 and 260 pounds, Cherry fits the MLB frame for pitchers that has become so popular. That he can consistently bring a fastball 90 mph — he topped out at 95 last season — puts him in first-round draft company.

"I can't recall a guy that highly touted coming from here," said Roger Janeway, a longtime Milwaukee Brewers scout and Englewood resident.

"He's in the top-10 kids in the country for his class. His body is easy to sell and he's not sloppy. It's going to come down to his signability."

Last season Cherry was 6-1 in 56 innings pitched. He struck out 94 and had an ERA of 1.38.

He also has spent the last two summers playing for the nationally known Midland Redskins. One of his teammates is 6-8 lefty pitcher Matt Smoral of Solon, who also signed with the Tar Heels.

"There's pretty good talk around that they might not ever see the campus," said Janeway.

Veteran Butler coach Trent Dues is a fan of how Cherry has chased his dream.

"It's hard to teach 95-96 (mph) and you can't teach 6-9. He's on a 10-inch hill and his wingspan, with his stride, he's several feet closer than the average pitcher to the plate. You add the speed and the fact that he's closer and that ball's on hitters before they know it. It makes it very difficult to hit."

North Carolina was twice national runner-up to Oregon State in 2006-07. South Carolina is the two-time defending NCAA national champ, which means the Carolinas are rooted in outstanding college baseball prospects.

"If he has a good spring, it'll definitely help his (draft) stock," Dues said.

"I know deep down he loves the Carolina blue, but I'm sure he would like to play some pro ball."