

NEWPORT GULLS BASEBALL

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"RAISING THE BAR IN SUMMER COLLEGIATE BASEBALL"

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Gulls to honor former star on Sovereign Bank Rusty Begnaud Night

NEWPORT, R.I. – It will be an emotional evening when the Newport Gulls welcome back former star pitcher Rusty Begnaud on Friday, July 27.

Begnaud, who pitched for the Gulls in 2002, will be the guest of honor at Sovereign Bank Rusty Begnaud Night. A special pregame ceremony will be held before Newport hosts Manchester in a New England Collegiate Baseball League contest. The Gulls are proud to have Sovereign Bank as a sponsor for Rusty Begnaud Night. As part of the special evening, the first 250 fans arriving for the game will receive a free set of baseball cards featuring the 2007 Gulls team.

A promising professional prospect, the right-handed Begnaud earned his league-leading sixth victory for the Pensicola Pelicans of the American Association on June 20, 2006. Hours later, he suffered a fractured spinal column after diving into a shallow pool. The accident left him paralyzed from the waist down.

On Friday, July 27, 2007, Begnaud and his family will take the mound at Newport's Cardines Field, where they will be joined by his 2002 teammates. That team went on to win the NECBL championship, with Begnaud playing a vital role. He was 5-1 during the regular season, and 1-1 in the postseason that year. His complete-game victory over Keene in Game 1 of the championship series set the tone for a Gulls sweep of the Swamp Bats.

"Rusty was a great Gull both on and off the field," said Newport Gulls General Manager Chuck Paiva. "He was one of our family members and left a lasting impression on us all when he played here in 2002. We were devastated when we heard the news of Rusty's accident, but we immediately started to look at ways that we could support him. We decided to have a night in his honor this summer and we were excited when he and his family confirmed that they could attend. We have received tremendous support in the process and our staff has done a great job in planning the details. This will be our biggest and most meaningful evenings as our Gulls Family comes together to honor and support one of our own."

In addition to his regular- and post-season heroics, Begnaud also delivered a memorable performance for Newport in an exhibition game against the USA Baseball National Team in July of 2002. Behind Begnaud's strong outing, the Gulls fell 3-2 to the national team after then-Arizona State freshman shortstop Dustin Pedroia - currently a Boston Red Sox rookie - executed a squeeze bunt to help plate the winning run for the national team.

Begnaud played two years at McNeese State and signed with the Royals as a nondrafted free agent in 2004. He spent two seasons in the Royals organization before signing with Pensacola in 2006.

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