

STATE COLLEGES

This Miami Dade College baseball star has a big time velocity and spin rate

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Miami Dade College pitcher Anthony Figueroa. COURTESY



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Anthony Figueroa is about 6-4 — counting the 10-inch mound.

Otherwise, the Miami Dade College lefty pitcher with a big fastball and a high spin rate is ... well ... unusually small.

Figueroa, a freshman, said he is 5-8 and 145 pounds. But MDC coach Adrian Morales laughed for several seconds when that information was relayed to him.

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"He's not 5-8," Morales said when he stopped laughing. "He wishes he was 5-8.

"I'm 5-7, and he's a little smaller than I am, maybe 5-6 or 5-5."

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Figueroa's pitching ability, though, is no joke. In a scrimmage against the St. Thomas University Bobcats last month, Figueroa flashed his fastball that Morales said ranges from 88 to 93 mph.

Bobcats coach Jorge Perez said Figueroa was MDC's most impressive pitcher.

"At first, I saw his size, and I thought: 'Who the heck is this kid?' But he's nasty," Perez said. "He mowed us down. He made us look like little kids."

Figueroa, whose parents come from Puerto Rico, is a Miami native. He started playing baseball at age three, in large part because his grandfather, dad and older brother all played in the minor leagues.

As a prep freshman and sophomore, Figueroa attended Flanagan High, but he never played varsity ball because his academics were deficient.

He transferred to Miami Beach for his junior season, but he never got on the mound because of arm tightness. It wasn't until the pandemic-shortened 2020 season that Figueroa finally made his prep debut, and he was brilliant.

Figueroa got four starts for Miami Beach and went 1-0 with a 0.32 ERA. He also struck out an impressive 45 batters in 22 innings.

But despite those numbers, Figueroa was under-recruited, which can be attributed to his lack of ideal size, his inactivity his first three years of high school and, of course, the pandemic.

Figueroa, though, wasn't worried.

"I knew I had the talent," he said. "There are guys who are 6-4 who can't throw like I can. I promise you: I will throw it right by you."

Morales, who won two national titles as an infielder at the University of South Carolina, won't disagree with Figueroa.

"He has elite stuff, and he is tough as nails," Morales said. "Scouts say his spin rate is big league. When you have that much spin, it's like trying to hit half a baseball."

THIS AND THAT

- Barry University, which went 17-4 last season, enters 2021 ranked sixth in the nation among NCAA Division II teams, according to Collegiate Baseball. The Bucs return seven of their nine starting position players, two of their three weekend starters and five of their top six best bullpen pitchers. Barry's best players are righthander Frank Gonzalez, ex-Hurricanes second baseman Willie Escala and outfielder Andrew Rapoza.
- NSU, another NCAA Division II power, is ranked 19th in the nation by Perfect Game. NSU is led by outfielder Adan Fernandez, infielder Alex Steinbach and pitcher JP Williams. Fernandez, an FIU transfer, hit .365 for NSU last year. Steinbach started 10 games for Illinois last year, hitting .300. Williams had a 1.99 ERA last season in five starts, including four against ranked teams.
- MDC, ranked 19th in the nation among junior colleges, is led by righthanders Carlos Lequerica and Nolan Santos, both of whom are Bethune-Cookman transfers. Outfielder Ian Jenkins, a transfer from South Carolina who hit .373 with five homers last season, leads the offense. Third baseman Henry Wallen, a lefty hitter who has committed to the Hurricanes for next season, is another hitter to watch.
- St. Thomas University, which went 19-5-1 last season, is ranked fourth in the nation in the NAIA coaches poll. In the past five years, the Bobcats have made it to five regionals and three NAIA World Series. They finished second in the nation in 2015 and 2019. This year, they are led by catcher Daniel Mondejar, outfielder Joey Thompson and pitcher Ernesto Pino.
- Florida Memorial, which went 8-12 last season, is led by ace pitcher Johnkiel Acosta, utility player Yunior Sanchez and outfielder Malik Shinozak. Newcomer Joe Lucas should be a force in the middle of the batting order.