

Ribera's Rise to the Top

Editorial and photos submitted by Fresno State Sports Information

Senior Jordan Ribera's journey to the top has not been one of the easiest roads traveled.

At first glance, Fresno State's first baseman looks more like a linebacker than a college baseball player. In fact, Jordan Ribera was both a football player and baseball player in high school. Originally, the senior had his sights set on playing college football for the Bulldogs. But then he broke his wrist and decided he was done with that game.

"I always wanted to play at Fresno State because my family was here," said Ribera. "In the City/County All-Star game, I ended up breaking my wrist. I decided on the spot that I didn't really want to play football anymore. I think it was out of anger more than anything. After that, I sat down with Coach Batesole and he asked if I wanted to play baseball."

Once Ribera retired his football jersey, he put all of his focus and energy into the other game he loved, baseball. He joined the Bulldogs in the fall of 2007 as a freshman. He quickly adjusted to college life and college baseball, but jumping into the lineup was not as easy.

"My freshman year was hard," said Ribera. "It was tough to go from playing all the time in high school to not playing as much at Fresno State. It was weird to go from playing every day to maybe a few at-bats a game or series. But, towards the end of the season I started playing more during the post-season and in Omaha."

Ribera finished his first season with 16 starts and 42 appearances. He hit .217 with a double, five home runs and 16 RBI. Two of his five home runs were at the famous Johnny Rosenblatt Stadium at the College World Series. By the end of his freshman year, Ribera was starting as a designated hitter and helped win the program's first national championship.

"I learned a lot from watching the guys play in front of me," said Ribera. "When I got a chance to play every day in the post season, I gave it my all. It was fun playing in Omaha and hitting a few home runs there. I had a bunch of best friends on that team and the fact that we kept winning and went to Omaha kept me motivated. It was a lot of fun just being around that group of guys."

Ribera left behind the struggle of not playing every day behind as he moved into the lineup and won a national title. As a sophomore, he faced a new obstacle, playing behind his best friend, Alan Ahmady, and battling to play first base.

"It was a struggle at first, trying to work my way back into the lineup," said Ribera. "It made it easier to have him be the guy in front of me because I grew up with him and he's one of my best friends. I played with him from elementary school to college and I learned a lot from him."

Ribera was thrown into the lineup towards the end of his sophomore season during the 2009 Western Athletic Conference and played every game of the postseason. He



rose to the occasion hitting back-to-back game-winning home runs lifting the Bulldogs to their fourth-straight WAC tournament title. He was named the tournament's Most Valuable Player and it was then that the Red Wave got a glimpse at how good the hometown ball player was.

Entering the 2010 season, it was time for Ribera to shine and show the nation what head coach Mike Batesole saw in him. And shine was exactly what Ribera did. He opened the season tying a Fresno State record by hitting a home run in three-consecutive at-bats against Nebraska.

The Bulldogs new first baseman did not stop there. He went on to lead the nation in home runs with 27, earned numerous All-American honors and was named WAC Player of the Year. The Dogs season ended sooner than many thought or preferred, but for Ribera it was a breakout season that showcased his power and ability.

"For me personally, it was exciting to get all those awards," said



Ribera. "We didn't do what we wanted to as a team, so it was a little bitter sweet. It was a good year to show what I was capable of doing personally and knowing that I could compete with the best across the nation."

He did not tweak much between his sophomore and junior season, but there was a huge difference in the power hitting first baseman. In addition to his 27 home runs, Ribera hit .343 with 20 doubles, two triples and 69 RBI.

"I think playing in the field helped a lot," said Ribera. "I didn't really like the designated hitter thing. I was never locked into the game like I am playing first base. When you go out and play defense you can forget about your last at-bat and you don't have as much time to think about the last at-bat."

It seemed that Ribera was now on the fast track to playing professional baseball and his journey with Fresno State was coming to an end. Unfortunately for Ribera and fortunately for the Bulldogs, he went un-drafted last season.

"I think that was a bit of a miscommunication, but you know life goes on," said Ribera. "I am graduating this year and I got to be a part of this team for one more year. It's like Steve Susdorf's situation a couple years ago. So far it's working out. I've got a bunch of best friends on this team and if I want to play pro ball, that part disappears."

After not being drafted, Ribera spent the summer before his senior season playing in the Cape Cod League. There he fine tuned his skills. Ribera finished the summer season leading the league in home runs and RBI. He also competed in the Cape Cod League home run derby at Fenway Park.

During his career on the baseball diamond, the two things that have never wavered are his positive attitude towards the game and

his support system.

"My parents have been the best support system during my career and my whole life," said Ribera. "My dad doesn't care what I do on the baseball field. You see a lot of guys who have dads that ride them too much. I am fortunate to not have that pressure from my dad. He is always there to give advice when I ask for it. He doesn't push me to do anything I don't want to do or get mad at me when I don't do something right on the field. My mom is the same way. They are there to watch me play and however long I decide to play they will be there cheering for me."

For the past couple of years, Ribera and his ear-to-ear grin at first base have been a Red Wave favorite. The trials and tribulations on the field have kept the senior grounded and humble in a game that can be unforgiving.

"Baseball has had a big impact on my life, but at the same time it's just a game," said Ribera. "It's a game that teaches you life lessons. It allows you to be humble and be yourself more than any other sport. It's fun to play with this group of guys, but there are other things out there that are important. I think if you keep that in mind, the game becomes more fun."

With Ribera's recipe of humbleness, fun and great teammates, the Bulldogs have the potential to go far and make another WAC championship and postseason run.

"It's exciting to see how well we are doing this year," said Ribera. "This is a special team and coming back for my senior year was the right decision. I can see this team doing something special and I get another year to play with some of my best friends."

Ribera has seen his fair share of ups and down during his time in a Bulldog jersey. One thing is clear, drafted or not, he is a proven winner on and off field. Ribera will graduate with a degree, multiple WAC title, a national championship and an attitude to be successful in whatever life throws his way.