The opportunity of being selected in the MLB draft is one that comes around only so few times. In the case of Wilmington Blue Rock’s outfielder Vance Vizcaino, that opportunity came not once, not twice but four times. The 24-year-old has made some tough decisions when it comes to how he approaches his career in baseball, but Vizcaino believes he has taken the proper steps to turn himself into a complete player.

Vizcaino was born and raised in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Baseball is something that’s been in his blood seemingly since birth. His mother, Debbie, was a volleyball player for Wake Forest University while his dad, Junior, played in the Pirates’ organization from 1987-1991 before becoming a scout for the Royals. Vizcaino lists his dad’s career as one of his factors for wanting to play baseball.

“The fact that my dad played before I was born. My biggest thing is that when I was five years old anytime anybody asked me what I wanted to be I always told them I wanted to be a baseball player. It’s not that I was obsessed and watched the game 24/7 it’s just that I’ve always wanted that to be a part of my life.”

At age 17, Vizcaino was selected in the 31st round of the 2012 draft by the New York Mets. Before he put pen to paper, the high school student consulted with his family. After some discussion, everyone in the family including Vizcaino agreed now was not the right time.

Vizcaino explains, “My family and I decided that I was too young. I wasn’t used to being out on my own yet. It wasn’t the right time for me in my career to start pro ball. I was very immature physically and I wanted to get some time in college, get some experience under my belt playing some better competition.”

The future for Vizcaino was one that involved a winding road that went through three different colleges along with an injury and more calls from the draft. The first stop on the journey was at the University of Tennessee. After an average season with the Volunteers, Vizcaino suffered a minor set-back as he had to nurse a torn labrum in his throwing arm. While most players would view injuries through a pessimistic view, Vizcaino saw this as the first of his many learning experiences that are a part of the game.

“It really put in perspective for me how precious it is to play this game. You can ask anybody that’s had any type of injury that’s taken more than 3-4 months to heal it really, really takes its toll when you’re away from the game. You can’t pick up a bat, you can’t catch. You just have to sit and wait until your arm is healed and then you can finally start taking baby steps in rehab and getting back on the field. It’s a tough thing to do, but going through that it really showed me the different sides of the game. I learned to watch the games a different way where you have to really pay attention rather than just sitting there and enjoying the lifestyle. It was a very educational experience and at no point would I say it was bad or put any hitches in my career.”

The injury in Vizcaino’s arm meant a whole year away from baseball. With rehab being the new priority, he decided to work on his education, packing his bags for Arizona where he would attend Glendale Community College. Vizcaino says this was no easy task.

“It was interesting. When I left the University of Tennessee I was on the fence about it. I had made friends on the team, the school was good but I wasn’t getting the playing time I was hoping for and there really was no upside in sight. It seemed it was best for me to head out and find somewhere else where I could take some time to recover.”

With the recovery finished, Vizcaino needed somewhere to play college baseball. The next stop in his journey took him to central Florida where he could put his talents on display at Stetson University. According to Vizcaino, they’ve had their eyes on him since high school, and when they found out he was no longer in Tennessee, they gave him an offer he couldn’t refuse. In his two years with the Hatters, Vizcaino found much more success along with more consistent playing time. In 2016 he scored a team-leading 47 runs along with 22 stolen bases in 25 attempts. The most important thing Vizcaino learned from his time at Stetson is something that you won’t find in his stat line, but in his attitude.

“I think the most valuable skill I learned was to just be myself and not try to be anything other than what I’m capable of doing. I’m not a big homerun hitter. I don’t hit for a lot of power. Just getting on base, trying to move up in stolen bases and taking advantage of using my speed by scoring runs, being a table-setter early on, until I get a little stronger and then the homeruns will come on their own. I think that was one of the biggest skills I learned at Stetson. Not trying to do more than I was capable of doing. Just by playing the game good things will come to you when you don’t put too much pressure on yourself. “

With plenty of preparation, and a humbling experience, Vizcaino was drafted for the fourth and final time in his career. This time felt very different for him. Besides raising his stock all the way to the 11th round, Vizcaino felt that mentally, the time was right.

“I knew I was ready to go. Any team that came to talk to me I told them it wasn’t about playing for money it was about starting my professional career. I really wanted the chance to go out and prove myself. I think the Royals organization took into consideration that this wasn’t something that I just wanted to do, it wasn’t a fantasy. I was going to put in the work, and then finally found a position in the outfield that worked for me so they found some value in me. The Royals have been good to me ever since I signed and even before then. The fact that my dad used to work for them was fantastic.”

After two years in rookie ball, Vizcaino finished the 2017 season in Low-A Lexington, batting .315 with 47 hits in 42 games along with 14 RBI and 11 stolen bases. During this time, Vance spent most of his time in the outfield, a position that was somewhat new to him. However, Vizcaino found the positives of the move from the infield to the outfield.

“It’s a much simpler mentality in the outfield. It’s not that you don’t have to focus, you always have to be locked in 100 percent on every pitch. There’s less thinking, you don’t have to worry as much about bunt plays or baserunners. In the outfield you focus on one pitch at a time and the situation. The game kind of slows down when you’re farther away from the plate. It actually worked out really well for me, I had less pressure on myself and I got to just relax and run down balls, which is what I like to do.”

After just 16 games with the Lexington Legends, Vizcaino earned the callup to the Blue Rocks on May 4th and made his debut on May 6th earlier this year. It didn’t take long for Vance to adjust to the difficulty of Advanced-A especially at the plate. Vizcaino notes, “The pitching style is a little bit different. In Low-A there’s a lot of talented pitchers that throw really hard and have decent secondary pitches. But, they don’t throw as many strikes, down there I was walking a lot more. Up here you have a lot of guys that will throw 2-seams, cutters, certain things to try and get you off their fastball and then they’ll throw their breaking balls for strikes. You have to really lock in and make sure you’re attacking your pitch and don’t miss it.”

Despite the increase in difficulty, Vizcaino gives praise to the clubhouse culture the Blue Rocks players and coaches have established to make the transition easier. “It’s a great work environment. We have a lot of great personalities in the locker room and in the dugout. Even the coaching staff loves to keep it loose, keep it fun and to make sure we never put too much pressure on ourselves.”

With so many players moving in and out of the Blue Rocks organization, it can be easy to lose track of just who exactly got their start in Wilmington. Fellow outfielders and Carolina League all-stars Khalil Lee and Kort Peterson were common counterparts in the outfield grass throughout May and June and two valuable teammates that Vizcaino has certain praise for.

“Playing with Khalil, playing with Kort was a great experience. They’re both really talented guys. It’s good to be in the outfield with people that you understand and work well with. Kort is really good in right, Khalil is good in center and I worked pretty well with him in left. It was great covering ground with them because not many fly balls were able to get to the ground because we have so many athletic guys out there. I’m super excited for both of them up in Double-A.”

Vizcaino also remains hopeful that he can join the duo in Double-A sometime soon. “If everything keeps going well I think I’ll get a call up but you can only control so much. All I can do is focus on my play and try to do the best that I can do. It’s helpful to be a part of this game, that you deal with failure, but the way you get better at it is through work and nothing is going to get you better besides work. Talent will get you to a certain point, but it will only get you so far. Sometimes it takes you all the way to the big leagues, but if it takes you to A ball or Double-A, you’re going to have to put in the work to get yourself to the level you really want to be at.

With the offseason slowly creeping up, Vizcaino has plenty of work lined up to improve his all-around game. However, even a player as busy as the outfielder has some free time every now and then. When it comes time to unwind Vizcaino keeps it simple. “I like to watch a lot of movies. Comedies and Superhero movies are my favorites. I started playing some video games this year. I like to play Nintendo games especially because they’re very fun and light. They might be childish but they keep things a little less serious. It’s a great way to take your mind off the game if you’re not playing or if you’re struggling, it’s good to go home and have something else to do besides stew and think about whether you had a good day or a bad day. You can just take your mind off it, focus on something else and hopefully have success on something else as well.”