



Tarik Skubal, '18

Athletics Hall of Fame

Major league baseball pitcher Tarik Skubal first learned about what sports psychologists call the 'flow state' from a sports and spirituality class taught by a Jesuit.

BY ANDREW BINION

Seattle University was about as far from Tarik Skubal's, '18, comfort zone in Arizona as he could get. When he arrived on campus as a freshman, the future big league southpaw pitcher didn't know a soul, an experience he values as essential to his development as a person and as an athlete.

"I had to grow pretty quickly and mature and kind of take care of things," says Skubal, who is preparing for his fourth season as a Major League Baseball pitcher with the Detroit Tigers. "There's a lot of growth to be had when you're uncomfortable and in a scenario you're not necessarily used to."

Once in Seattle, he learned he wasn't just competing against batters—he was also competing against himself.

"The classes weren't always easy early in the morning, that routine of being an athlete, too," says Skubal. "It's not always what you want to do, but it'll all be worth it in the end."

This year, Tarik Skubal is the newest inductee into the Athletics Hall of Fame, recognized at this year's Alumni Awards.

Seattle University was the only Division I school to offer Skubal a scholarship and he jumped at the chance to prove himself at the college level. But he didn't

always want to be a baseball player. Basketball was his focus growing up, but Skubal played baseball to stay in shape during the offseason. Since he could throw the ball across the plate, he got picked to pitch.

Then he started throwing harder. And harder still.

"That's when I realized that I needed to keep doing this thing," Skubal says. "That was my shot to go to school."

During his time on SU's baseball team he battled through injuries that kept him off the mound for long periods of time. His junior year he turned down an offer from the Arizona Diamondbacks, opting instead to return and play one more year for the Redhawks and complete his degree in finance.

"I just felt like there was some unfinished business," Skubal says.

His senior year he was drafted again, this time by the Detroit Tigers.

Though he missed part of last season for surgery on his throwing arm, a *Detroit Free Press* story in November found that when healthy, Skubal graded as the top pitcher in all major league baseball in 2023 and could end up being a Cy Young Award candidate this year.

On a personal level, 2023 also marked another important step in Skubal's life, with his wife Jessica and

him welcoming their first child, Kasen.

When he looks back on his experience at Seattle University one of the first things that comes to mind is the sports and spirituality class taught by Patrick Kelly, S.J., he took as a freshman.

"SU holds a very special place in my heart, the city, the college, the coaching staff, the teammates," Skubal says. "It took a small-town kid from Arizona and made me grow up and taught me the value of teamwork and that brotherhood that you get playing sports."

For Skubal, the concept Father Kelly introduced to him was the idea of a "flow state," an intuitive focus athletes achieve when in the heat of competition.

Fr. Kelly left the university in 2019 and now teaches at the University of Detroit Mercy in his Michigan hometown. Last summer, Fr. Kelly attended a game to watch Skubal pitch. As Skubal walked out onto the field to warm up, Fr. Kelly wanted to get his attention so he shouted, "Go Redhawks!"

Skubal got a kick out of seeing his former teacher in the stands.

"I pitched well that game," Skubal says. "So that was cool."

[Watch a video on Tarik's impact](#)