

MAX-
IMUM
IN-
TEN-
SITY

Cy Young Award winner and former Mizzou ace Max Scherzer is shredding Major League lineups for the Washington Nationals.

STORY BY MARCUS WILKINS

EVERY GREAT PITCHER HAS ONE. THERE'S RANDY JOHNSON'S SCOWL. BOB GIBSON'S GLARE. NOLAN RYAN'S GLOWER. IN ADDITION TO FIERY FASTBALLS AND SLUGGER-STUPEFYING SLIDERS, EACH OF BASEBALL'S BEST HURLERS HAS A SIGNATURE STARE FROM 60 FEET, 6 INCHES AWAY.

↑ **MAX SCHERZER,**

HOWEVER, HAS A GENETIC ADVANTAGE. THE WASHINGTON NATIONALS ACE HAS HETEROCHROMIA IRIDUM, A HARMLESS (IN HIS CASE) CONDITION RESULTING IN ONE BLUE EYE AND ONE BROWN EYE. IT'S THE LAST THING MANY HITTERS SEE BEFORE WHIFFING AND DEJECT-EDLY STROLLING BACK TO THE DUGOUT.

→ Former Mizzou pitcher Max Scherzer's *heterochromia iridum*, different colored eyes, gives the fireballer an unusual look from the mound. The St. Louis native became one of the NCAA's most dominant hurlers during his three-year college career. Scherzer adopted his dogs Rafi (left) and Bo, who like her owner, has one brown eye and one blue eye.

"I joke that the blue eye is slow-mo and the brown one is high definition," says Scherzer, Bus '06. "During replay situations, I say, 'You don't need to look at the video, guys; he was out.'"

Scherzer might seem intense while peering homeward from the mound, but his teammates and coaches say he balances his "Mad Max" persona with a fun-loving side. As Mizzou's ace in 2005, he took Big 12 Pitcher of the Year honors while leading the conference in ERA (1.86) and strikeouts (131), a total that broke a 14-year-old school record. The following season, he placed second in the league in ERA (2.25) and helped propel the underdog Tigers to the super-regional round of the NCAA Tournament.

"From about the third or fourth start of his sophomore year (2005) to the end of the season, I can honestly tell you he is the best college pitcher I have ever seen," says 22-year Mizzou Coach Tim Jamieson, who also has coached the USA Baseball Collegiate National Team. "We were playing really good teams, and they couldn't get the bat on him. You just don't see that in college games with aluminum bats."

The 31-year-old Scherzer has been cultivating that pitching prowess for nearly three decades, according to his dad.

"We played in the basement when he was 2, and he could hit and throw the ball even back then," says Brad Scherzer, BS BA '76. "I remember coming home from work when he was 4 or 5, and he'd be waiting there with a bat and ball, ready to go."

TRUE TIGER

Scherzer grew up in Chesterfield, Missouri, where his dad and mom, Jan Scherzer, BS Ed '76, and multiple alumni aunts and uncles instilled Mizzou pride. An academic whiz and a football, baseball and basketball star at Parkway Central High School, Scherzer was sold on black and gold despite offers from other schools, including Stanford. He was even selected in the late rounds of the amateur draft by the hometown St. Louis Cardinals, but the timing wasn't right.

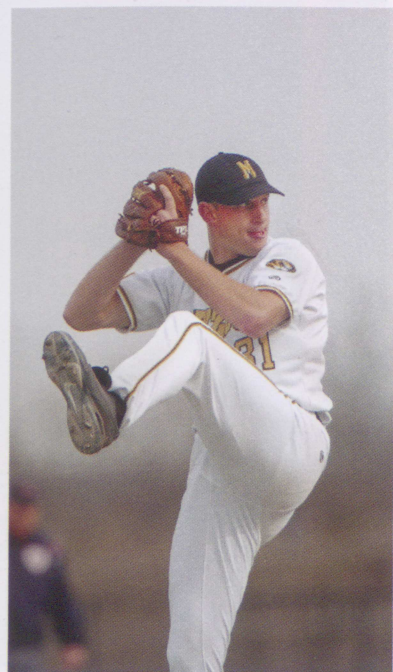
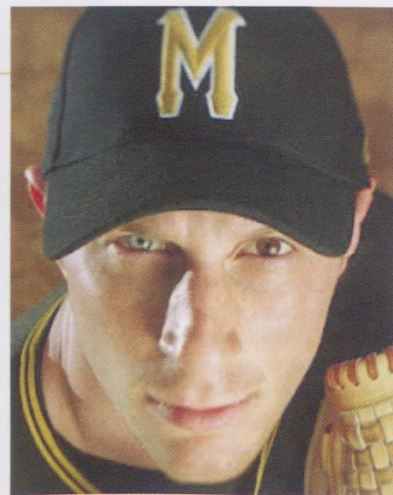
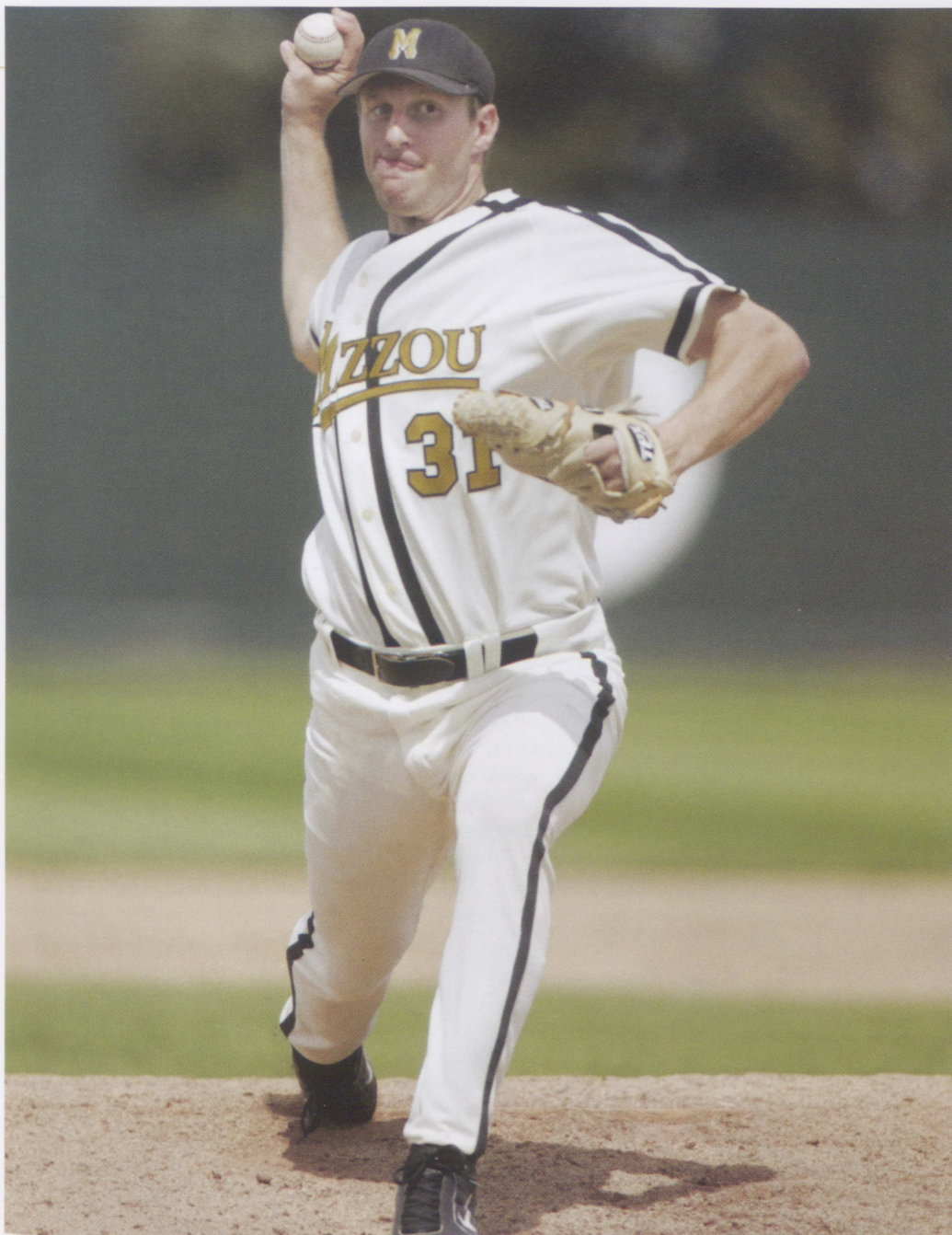
"Mizzou put together the best package," Scherzer says. "A winning baseball team, a good education and having a lot of fun."

Scherzer struggled with limited playing time his freshman year, a season he still regards as one of the most difficult of his baseball career. But Tony Vitello, a former Mizzou pitching coach who is now an assistant coach and recruiting coordinator at SEC-rival Arkansas, and Scott Bird, Mizzou director of baseball strength and conditioning, developed Scherzer's mind and muscle. The coaches also assigned Scherzer to play in a summer league in 2004 with the La Crosse (Wisconsin) Loggers, a collegiate developmental team.

"He was a really good hitter, almost to the point where he wanted to" play outfield, Vitello says. "But my concern, and Coach Jamieson's, was if this guy hurts himself on the bases, it's going to be a disaster for us because he is going to be such a talent on the mound."

Scherzer credits Bird for a weight-room mindset the pitcher has carried to the big leagues. He attacks his training regimen with the same tenacity he employs when facing opposing hitters.

"The physical aspect is also a mental aspect — you have to train every single day and push your body to the limit," Scherzer says. "You don't just



"I JOKE THAT THE BLUE EYE IS SLOW-MO AND THE BROWN ONE IS HIGH DEFINITION," SAYS SCHERZER, BUS '06. "DURING REPLAY SITUATIONS, I SAY, 'YOU DON'T NEED TO LOOK AT THE VIDEO, GUYS; HE WAS OUT.'"



PROFILE

† Scherzer threw two no-hitters for the Washington Nationals in 2015. He struck out 10 Pirates on June 20, for a 6-0 shutout, then fanned 17 Mets on Oct. 3, to lead the Nats to a 2-0 win.

go into the weight room and just kind of get your work done. You go in there with an attitude that you're going to absolutely push yourself."

Scherzer also learned from Vitello a technique Mizou pitchers call "A3P," which stands for "after three pitches." It's a hyper-focused strategy aimed at controlling the count after the first three pitches of an at-bat.

"He was absolutely relentless when it came to throwing first-pitch strikes," says Rick Knapp, one of Scherzer's pitching coaches with the Detroit Tigers and the current pitching coordinator for the Los Angeles Dodgers' minor league system. "His goal was to lead the league in that category."

THE MAJORS

The Arizona Diamondbacks selected Scherzer with the 11th-overall pick of the 2006 MLB draft, making him the first Tiger to go in the first round and Mizou's highest-ever selection at the time. He rose quickly through the minor leagues and was named Arizona's rookie of the year in 2008 after posting a 3.05 ERA in 16 appearances.

When a trade landed him in Detroit, Scherzer took his game to yet another level. In the 2012 World Series, Scherzer pitched game four — in 30-degree temperatures and snow flurries — a moment Brad ranks among his proudest as a father. Detroit lost to the San Francisco Giants in the series, but Scherzer followed it with a season for the ages.

In 2013, he was the first pitcher to start a campaign 12-0 for Detroit, a franchise with a storied pitching legacy that includes Hal Newhouser, Denny McLain and many other stars. He was the majors' only 20-game winner that year, with a league-leading 2.90 ERA and a career-high 240 strikeouts. Scherzer's stellar season earned him the 2013 American League Cy Young Award; he received 28 of 30 first-place votes.

In 2015, the Nationals lured Scherzer with one of the richest contracts in the sport's history — \$210 million over seven years. Scherzer repaid baseball fans in the nation's capital with another career high in strikeouts (276) and two no-hitters, making him the first American League pitcher to notch a pair during the regular season since Nolan Ryan in 1973.

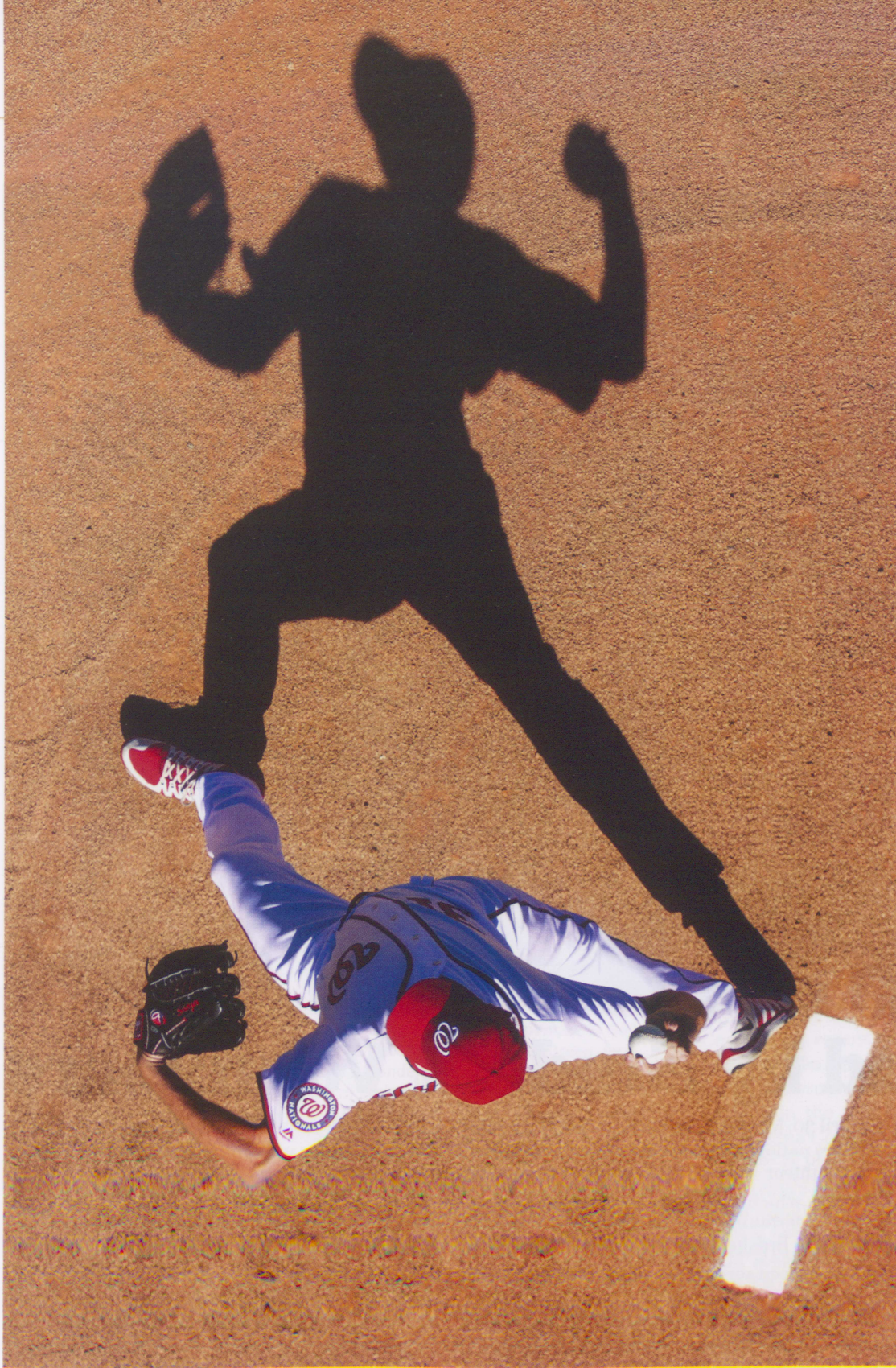
"How elite is Max? How many No. 1 pitchers are there in the majors?" says Knapp, explaining Scherzer's status among the cream of the crop. "Every team has one chronologically, but that doesn't mean they're a true No. 1. For the sake of argument, let's say there are 30 — there might be a couple teams with two and a couple of teams that don't have any. Well, it took 15 years of drafts to get those 30."

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The Scherzer family maintains a strong bond through baseball, and Brad and Jan travel the country to attend Max's biggest games. In addition to the World Series, they have witnessed their son's major league debut; his start in the 2013 All-Star Game in New York; several spring trainings; and his first no-hitter, which happened Father's Day weekend in Washington, D.C.

Scherzer still counts numerous college teammates among his closest friends, including Mizou assistant coaches J.C. Field, the Tigers' catcher in 2005-06, and former All-American outfielder Hunter Mense. In fact, Scherzer is so dedicated to





Tigers Afield

Mizzou's baseball program has produced its share of professional-grade talent. Check out this list of former Tigers currently in the major and minor leagues and their respective MLB organizations.

*Aaron Crow

Chicago Cubs

Peter Fairbanks

Texas Rangers

Eric Garcia

Atlanta Braves

*Kyle Gibson

Minnesota Twins

Brett Graves

Oakland Athletics

*Ian Kinsler

Detroit Tigers

Josh Lester

Detroit Tigers

*Ryan Lollis

San Francisco Giants

*Brett Nicholas

Texas Rangers

Andrew Schwaab

New York Yankees

Keaton Steele

Minnesota Twins

*Matt Stites

Arizona Diamondbacks

*Nick Tepesch

Texas Rangers

Ben Turner

San Francisco Giants

Breckin Williams

Arizona Diamondbacks

*Played in the major leagues.

his alma mater's athletics program that he wore a sticker on his sweatshirt boasting the final score, 41-26, of Mizzou football's win against Georgia in 2013 during the press conference of an American League Championship Series game.

"Every single day he was just incredibly competitive, whether it was in his drill work or his

bullpen sessions," says Field of his former battery mate, who holds another little-known team record — for scarfing three Chipotle burritos in one sitting. That competitive drive "was something that really set him apart. But at the same time, you can always call him, and to this day he is still just goofy Max." **M**