

It was hard to find somebody better on and off the baseball...

## It was hard to find somebody better on and off the baseball field than Jake Laber

By [Jeff Kolpack](#) on Aug 15, 2016 at 4:41 p.m.



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FARGO—Fargo-Moorhead RedHawks pitcher Taylor Stanton was due to throw Wednesday at Sioux City and then participate in the Friday wedding of his friend Jake Laber. Longtime high school friend and former Fargo North baseball teammate Todd Deutsch was ready to fly to Fargo from Washington D.C. to celebrate.

Now their thoughts are turning to a funeral.

The 30-year-old Laber died unexpectedly Sunday, Aug. 14, of unknown causes. He and Karisa Gullickson were to be married Friday with a groom's dinner Thursday at Newman Outdoor Field.

"It's tough, so unexpected, kind of hard to believe," Deutsch said. "It's just tragic. What he did on the baseball field—we all remember how good he was there—but I think also he will be remembered as someone incredibly kind, smart and thoughtful."

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Laber was almost entirely local with his baseball career, starting with North and Fargo American Legion, moving on to North Dakota State and then spending six years with the RedHawks, where he retired after the 2014 season as the team's all-time leader in pitching wins with 46.

An autopsy was to be performed on Monday. RedHawks manager Doug Simunic said Laber had begun treatments for a curable form of cancer. Derek Ouren, who was going to be a groomsman, said the plan for the wedding was to get through it since side effects from radiation probably weren't going to hit Laber for another two or three weeks.

On Monday, everybody close to Laber had trouble finding the right words.

"We've had this long line of finding the best local talent," Buchholz said. "And it probably starts back with Chris Coste. A guy like Jake is right up there with the all-time greats in our franchise. Off the field, you couldn't ask for a nicer guy."

The left-handed Laber also has RedHawks career records for games started with 102, innings pitched with 648.1 and strikeouts with 407.

"Such a tragedy," Simunic said. "I'm speechless to the point of where I don't know what to say. Such a young guy."

His last game will be the most memorable to Buchholz. It came—appropriately—on Labor Day when Laber probably knew it was going to be his final appearance in a RedHawks uniform but had yet to announce his intentions, Buchholz said.

"He threw eight shutout innings," Buchholz said. "That was a satisfying, fun day. A beautiful day. Jake just went out and did what he did. He was dominant that day."

At NDSU, Laber is second on the Bison career charts for starts with 45 and third in innings pitched with 287 and strikeouts at 234. At North, he graduated in 2004 with most of the school's major pitching records and helped lead the Spartans as a sophomore to a North Dakota Class A state baseball title in 2002. He was the North Dakota Senior Player of the Year in 2004. He led Fargo to a state Legion championship in 2005, where he was named the tournament's most valuable player.

He left his mark with Fargo Post 2 and beyond, former Fargo coach Bill Ibach said on his Facebook page.

"He was a coach's dream—a player with great ability who was also a great teammate and person," Ibach said.

Visitation will be Saturday, Aug. 20, from 10 to 11 a.m. with funeral to follow at 11 a.m. at Salem Evangelical Free Church in Moorhead. Hanson-Runsvold Funeral Home in Fargo is handling arrangements.

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#### Jeff Kolpack

Jeff Kolpack covers North Dakota State athletics, the Fargo Marathon and golf for The Forum. His blog can be accessed at [www.bisonmedia.areavoices.com](http://www.bisonmedia.areavoices.com). On the radio, Kolpack & Izzo sports talk show runs from 9-11 a.m. every Saturday morning. April through August, the WDAY Golf Show with Jeff Kolpack runs from 8-9 a.m.

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