

= Michael Wacha =

Michael Joseph Wacha (/ ˈwʌtʃə / ; born July 1 , 1991) is an American professional baseball pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals of Major League Baseball (MLB) . He played college baseball for the Texas A & M Aggies .

The Cardinals selected Wacha in the first round of the 2012 Major League Baseball Draft from Texas A & M. With just one year in the minor leagues , he made his MLB debut on May 30 , 2013 . Following a strong regular season , Wacha earned the 2013 National League Championship Series Most Valuable Player Award , after yielding one run and eight hits in his first 21 postseason innings pitched .

= = Early life = =

Michael Wacha was born in Iowa City , Iowa , to Tom and Karen Wacha as the second of four children . He has one older brother , Charlie , one younger brother , Lucas , and a younger sister , Brette . When Wacha was three years old , his family moved from Iowa City to Texarkana , Texas . His future college coach , Rob Childress , first spotted Wacha pitching in an American Legion game ; Wacha 's father was the coach and his sister the batgirl . Wacha 's uncle , Dusty Rogers , pitched in the Cincinnati Reds organization from 1984 through 1988 .

= = Amateur career = =

Wacha attended Pleasant Grove High School in Texarkana , Texas , where he played for the school 's baseball and basketball teams . As a basketball player , he lettered three years as a forward and was honored on the first @-@ team all @-@ district on his way to advancing his school to the regional finals during his senior year . In his junior baseball season , Wacha posted a 16 ? 3 W ? L record , pitching the Hawks to the state finals . As a senior , he led the Hawks to the state semi @-@ finals in his senior year in 2009 with a 6 ? 3 win ? loss record (W ? L record) . Wacha was a two @-@ time all @-@ state selection ; he was selected to the all @-@ state first @-@ team and all @-@ state tournament team . Excelling academically , Wacha was a member of the National Honor Society ; in basketball , Wacha earned first @-@ team academic all @-@ state honors .

As an enrollee at Texas A & M University , Wacha played three years of college baseball for the Texas A & M Aggies . At this point , Wacha stood 6 ' 5 " (77 inches (200 cm)) tall , weighed 180 pounds (82 kg) and threw his fastball with a velocity between 84 miles per hour (135 km / h) and 88 miles per hour (142 km / h) . During his freshman campaign , he made ten starts in 25 total appearances and posted a 2 @. @ 90 earned run average (ERA) and a 9 ? 2 W ? L record . Wacha also registered 97 strikeouts (SO) and 22 walks (BB) in 105 1 ? 3 innings pitched (IP) . His nine wins ranked fifth and 2 @. @ 90 ERA sixth in the Big 12 Conference . For his performance , Louisville Slugger named Wacha a freshman All @-@ American .

In his sophomore year , Wacha posted a 9 ? 4 record in 16 starts with 123 SO and just 20 BB and a 2 @. @ 29 ERA in 129 2 ? 3 IP . That performance earned him a spot as a Third Team All @-@ American and All @-@ Big 12 Second Team . Wacha was a member of the USA Baseball Collegiate National Team . He also pitched in the Big 12 Championship , NCAA College Station Regional and College World Series at the end of his sophomore year .

= = Professional career = =

= = = Draft and minor leagues (2012 ? 13) = = =

The Cardinals selected Wacha in the first round with the 19th overall selection of the 2012 MLB Draft and signed him for \$ 1 @. @ 9 million on June 14 , 2012 . His draft slot originally belonged to the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim , who , upon signing Albert Pujols as a free agent , surrendered

it to the Cardinals . Cardinals director of scouting Dan Kantrovitz foresaw Wacha as a future starter for the Cardinals whose size and competitive nature drew favorable comparisons with right @-@ handers Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright .

Wacha ascended quickly through the minor leagues . The Cardinals first assigned Wacha to the Gulf Coast League (Rookie League) Cardinals , then promoted him to the Palm Beach Cardinals in the Florida State League and finally to the Springfield Cardinals of the Double @-@ A Texas League before the 2012 season ended . In 21 innings pitched (IP) between the three levels , he struck out 40 batters , allowed just eight hits , four walks and two runs . With Springfield , he pitched eight innings , struck out 17 batters , and allowed just one home run (HR) .

The Cardinals invited Wacha to their major league spring training camp in 2013 . He impressed team management and players alike , striking out fifteen batters while only allowing one walk and one unearned run in eleven and two @-@ thirds innings of work before being reassigned to the minor league camp .

Wacha started the 2013 season with the Memphis Redbirds of the Class AAA Pacific Coast League , going 4 ? 0 with a league @-@ leading 2 @.@ 05 ERA in nine games started and 52 2 ? 3 IP before his first call @-@ up to the Major Leagues . His overall season totals at Memphis included a 2 @.@ 65 ERA in 15 starts , 73 SO and 85 IP .

= = = St. Louis Cardinals (2013 ? present) = = =

= = = = Rookie season (2013) = = = =

The Cardinals activated Wacha on May 30 to make his major league debut against the Kansas City Royals at Busch Stadium . Just 364 days after throwing his last pitch for Texas A & M , Wacha was standing on a major league mound for the first time .

In his first at @-@ bat in the majors , Wacha singled to right @-@ center field . On the mound , he demonstrated the prodigious pitching ability that rapidly shuttled him through the minor leagues when he retired the first 13 Royals he faced before giving up a hit , a double in the fifth inning . That runner then scored after another hit . He pitched seven innings with 93 pitches (67 strikes) , giving up only two hits and one run , walking none , and striking out six , leaving with a 2 ? 1 lead . Wacha lost the chance for a win in the ninth , when Mitchell Boggs relieved and gave up a tying home run to the first batter he faced .

The Arizona Diamondbacks scored six runs against Wacha in his second start , which turned out to be a no @-@ decision on his part . Wacha earned his first MLB win on June 11 as the Cardinals beat the New York Mets 9 ? 2 at Citi Field . The game got off to a rough start as he gave up a home run to the second Met batter he faced , walked three others and saw his team fall behind two runs in the first inning . However , he rebounded and scattered five hits and no more walks over six total innings of work . It was Wacha 's third career start . Three days after earning his first major league win , the Cardinals optioned Wacha back to Memphis to clear roster room for pitcher Jake Westbrook as he returned from the disabled list (DL) . During his first stint with the Cardinals , Wacha posted a 1 @-@ 0 record with an ERA of 4 @.@ 58 in three starts .

The Cardinals recalled Wacha in mid @-@ August and he was on the roster to stay for the remainder of the season . He started one game against the Chicago Cubs before being moved to the bullpen . Manager Mike Matheny placed him back in the rotation in September . He pitched six shutout innings with just three hits against the Cincinnati Reds .

Encompassing his last regular @-@ season game and first three playoff appearances in 2013 , Wacha authored a series of masterful performances . On September 24 , he pitched a no @-@ hitter through 8 2 ? 3 innings against the Washington Nationals that ended when Ryan Zimmerman stroked an infield single that glanced off Wacha 's glove . It was Washington 's only hit as the Cardinals prevailed 2 ? 0 . It was also the third potential no @-@ hitter lost with the final out to go on the 2013 season , after Yu Darvish and Yusmeiro Petit . Wacha finished his regular season in the Major Leagues appearing in 15 games , making nine starts and pitching 64 2 ? 3 innings . He

surrendered 52 hits , twenty runs , five home runs and struck out 65 hitters for a 2 @. @ 78 ERA .

= = = First playoff experience (2013) = = =

On October 7 , Wacha started his first Major League playoff game . In 7 1 ? 3 innings of Game 4 of the 2013 National League Division Series (NLDS) ? an elimination game against the Pittsburgh Pirates ? he again surrendered one hit (a home run) and two walks . Due to Wacha 's back @-@ to @-@ back one @-@ hit performances , Matheny announced that he would start Game 2 of the National League Championship Series (NLCS) . In that game on October 12 , he outdueled Clayton Kershaw in 6 2 ? 3 innings for a 1 ? 0 victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers . In just the 11th start of his MLB career , Wacha joined Bob Gibson as the only pitchers in franchise history to strike out at least eight batters while yielding one or no runs in consecutive postseason starts .

Facing Kershaw again in Game 6 , Wacha yielded just two hits in seven innings as his opponent unravelled in a 9 ? 0 victory that sent the Cardinals to the World Series . Wacha won both his NLCS starts , holding the Dodgers to a .149 batting average against (BAA) , two walks and 13 SO in 13 2 ? 3 scoreless IP as he earned the NLCS MVP . He became the fourth rookie to win a postseason MVP , following Larry Sherry (1959 World Series) , Mike Boddicker (1983 NLCS) , and Liván Hernández (1997 NLCS and 1997 World Series) . Through the NLCS , Wacha allowed just one run on eight hits in 21 IP for a 0 @. @ 43 ERA while striking out 22 .

Starting Game Two of the World Series against the Boston Red Sox , Wacha pitched six innings in a 4 ? 2 Cardinals ' victory , although he said after the game he " didn 't have [his] best stuff . " Before surrendering a home run to David Ortiz , Wacha tied Gibson with the longest scoreless streak (19 innings) in Cardinals ' postseason history . Wacha became the 17th @-@ youngest pitcher overall to win a World Series game and the second @-@ youngest in Cardinals history behind only Paul Dean . In Game 6 , with the Cardinals facing elimination once more , Wacha was again called upon to save their season after winning four consecutive playoff starts with a 1 @. @ 00 ERA and just 11 hits allowed in 27 innings for a .122 opponents ' batting average . However , the Red Sox finally solved him , tagging him for six runs in 3 2 ? 3 innings on the way to defeating the Cardinals for their eighth World Series title .

= = = 2014 ? present = = =

Wacha was guaranteed a regular post in the rotation at the outset of the 2014 season , and his first two starts came against the Reds . Receiving one win and one no @-@ decision , he furthered a strong start against them . His first career 22 2 ? 3 IP against them included just 13 hits and five walks allowed with 20 SO and a 0 @. @ 40 ERA . In an April 24 start against the New York Mets , Wacha struck out nine batters in the first three innings . This was just the 11th such occurrence in the expansion era . With 41 miles per hour (66 km / h) winds whipping , he struck out ten total in four innings but also walked five and required 93 pitches . Two of the walks proved costly as they were with the bases loaded ; the Mets took advantage in a 3 ? 2 triumph .

Wacha 's first 15 starts of 2014 included a 2 @. @ 79 ERA and 5 ? 5 W ? L. However , after pitching with lingering shoulder discomfort and fatigue in May and June , the Cardinals placed him on the DL on June 18 . A series of magnetic resonance (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) images revealed an injury termed as a stress reaction in the scapula behind his throwing arm . The stress reaction apparently was a case of the shoulder not repairing itself as fast as the strain from regular pitching had caused between the scapula bone and tendons .

Although similar to the stress fracture injury Brandon McCarthy suffered , it was deemed less severe . According to medical opinion , it was part of the same injury process , but Wacha 's injury had not progressed as far as McCarthy 's as a fracture had yet to occur . Therefore , Cardinals general manager John Mozeliak stated , as " a precursor to a stress fracture , ... which is a precursor to a ... fracture , " it was more manageable to correct . With limited knowledge on the related biomechanical processes , the Cardinals training and medical staff researched methods to treat Wacha 's injury and circumvent the same course from happening again ; likewise , they were

uncertain of when he was to return to play .

Wacha surrendered a series @-@ ending , three @-@ run walk @-@ off home run to Travis Ishikawa of the San Francisco Giants in the ninth inning of Game 5 of the 2014 NLCS , as the Giants prevailed , 6 ? 3 .

The Cardinals won each of Wacha 's first nine starts of 2015 while he credited as the winner in seven of them . With an ERA of 1 @.@ 87 , he became the first Cardinal to start with a 7 ? 0 record since Matt Morris started 8 ? 0 in 2005 . He was selected to his first All @-@ Star Game , played at Great American Ball Park in Cincinnati . The Cardinals skipped 10 days between two August starts over concerns about his shoulder . To that point , he was 15 ? 4 with a 2 @.@ 69 ERA and 1 @.@ 12 WHIP . In Game 4 of the NLDS against the Cubs on October 12 , 2015 , Wacha surrendered three home runs in 4 1 ? 3 innings in an 8 ? 6 loss .

= = Pitching profile = =

Standing 6 ' 6 " (78 inches (200 cm)) tall and weighing 210 pounds (95 kg) , Wacha repeats the same delivery with all his pitches . Featuring a sinking fastball that usually travels between 92 miles per hour (148 km / h) and 95 miles per hour (153 km / h) , Wacha frequently shows velocity up to 97 miles per hour (156 km / h) . His high arm angle and release point create substantial downward action on his fastball . Wacha 's fastball complement , a changeup , features deep , fading movement to right @-@ handed hitters with a 10 miles per hour (16 km / h) to 12 miles per hour (19 km / h) decrease in velocity from his fastball . Not only is his arm angle on the two pitches the same , the arm speed appears virtually identical to the hitter , thus disguising the difference in velocity .

Wacha 's third pitch is an average curveball that travels about 77 miles per hour (124 km / h) and has improved in break and consistency ; in college , scouts considered his curveball a below average pitch . He has a fourth pitch , a slider , that lacks consistent break and darts horizontally similar to the cutter . Wacha attributed the increase in pitch velocity to gaining weight from physical exercise and increased food consumption , asserting that he " felt like the velocity just kept on increasing every single year . I changed my mechanics a little bit when I was in college , and that might have added a few ticks . " Wacha added a cut fastball (commonly called a " cutter ") late in the 2013 season , though he only threw the pitch 1 @.@ 8 % of the time . During the 2014 spring training , Wacha showed increased confidence in the pitch after finding a consistent grip .

Depending on the source , Wacha shows a wide range of potential . Scouting reports initially projected him for a potential of two plus @-@ plus pitches (fastball and changeup) with command of both . Baseball Prospectus noted that his polish due to pitch command helped fast @-@ track him to the Major Leagues . However , a dearth of vigorous fastball life escalates the importance of command . Wacha offsets the shortage of sizable vertical movement with the pronounced descent through which his fastball , changeup and curve travel to create an additional obstacle as hitters to attempt square the bat on the pitch . In addition , the drop in elevation changes the hitter 's eye level . Wacha was previously criticized for a heavy reliance on the fastball from lacking a solid breaking pitch . Before refining his curveball , Baseball Prospect Nation commented that development of a slider " to even only an occasional ' show @-@ me ' pitch would add another element to his game and allow him to become more refined in his pitch sequencing ability to work through a lineup . "

During each at @-@ bat , Wacha does not easily give in to the batter . He maintains his composure on the mound . With both fastball and changeup being plus @-@ plus pitches and improved command , Baseball Prospectus and Baseball Prospect Nation conclude his likely future is as a solid number @-@ three starter . However , as command of his curve has markedly improved , so have his projections . The same initial reports stated that if he could enhance his slider 's reliability , he may be able to become a low @-@ end number two starter . Still others , such as scout Ralph Garr , Jr . , and Kantrovitz , project him as a " future top @-@ of @-@ the @-@ rotation guy . "

= = Awards = =

= = Personal life = =

As both a play on his last name , and the pronunciation of his first and last names together , " Wacha Wacha " became a phenomenon in 2013 following the favorite catch phrase of Fozzie Bear of The Muppets , and for its similarity to the sound effects from the Pac @-@ Man arcade game . A restaurant in St. Louis named a milkshake the " Wacha Wacha " following his 2013 NLCS MVP honors . The milkshake 's ingredients included vanilla with chocolate chips and Cracker Jacks . Although he could not remember the name of the restaurant (believed to be Fozzie 's) , he stated the Cracker Jacks " added a little baseball flair to it . "