

# Mustangs look to Grant to lead pitching staff

By Sisco Molina  
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CHEYENNE – The way Kyle Grant closed the 2016 summer season on the mound for the Cheyenne Mustangs had both him and coach Rick Thompson optimistic for what the future held for the right-hander.



Grant

His start wasn't so hot, though.

"There was a learning curve for him, and his first outing or two was a little tough for him," Thompson said.

Thompson felt Grant was relying on his fastball too much and working too much over the middle of the plate. That was a result of not having the experience pitching at the varsity level with it being his first year.

Grant grimaced a little while recounting his first start from last season. He also agreed he was a little too reliant on his fastball early on.

"In our first game up in Miles City (Montana), I got two home runs hit off me and they were both fastballs. That wasn't a great start," Grant recalled.

It was after a rough couple of outings that Thompson started to work with Grant on developing his other pitches and bolstering his arsenal.

Along with that, they worked what pitches to throw when – understanding that different situations call for different approaches on the mound like they do for hitters in the box.

And as the season wore on, Grant got better and better.

"He changed speeds more effectively as the season went on and his curve ball got a little better,"

Thompson said. "He learned how to mix those in and keep hitters off balance, and he began to win a lot of games."

Grant said a lot of his rise

had to do with getting more comfortable playing primarily as a pitcher – something he wasn't used to.

"Last year was the first time I was a (pitcher only) and so I got really frustrated because I couldn't bat or couldn't play other positions," Grant said. "Once I started to settle down and I got stronger, I felt myself grow as a pitcher."

He also gave a lot of the credit to his defense for the way they backed him up, and to Thompson, who studies opponents' hitters and their tendencies at the plate.

It helped, too, that Grant has four pitches – fastball, change-up, curve ball and knuckle ball – that he can be effective with.

"(Thompson) knows what batters can hit when, so he always changes things up. I don't know what I'm going to throw the next pitch sometimes," Grant said. "It just really helps keeping the batters off balance because they don't know what's coming."

"I don't even know what's coming."

That made Grant that much more dangerous as a pitcher. He worked his way into some key starts down the stretch of the season for the Mustangs as they finished with a 35-19 record.

This season, Grant will be looked to for big matchups from the beginning. The Mustangs open the 2017 season by hosting Miles City in a doubleheader at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. today at Powers Field. The teams also face off at 10 a.m. and noon Sunday.

"Last year, he worked into those starts as the season went on," Thompson said.

"This year, we'll expect him to step into that role as the season begins."

"That experience will be big for him."

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