

YOUNG, from Page 1B

Esmay said Young is a competitor.

"The best thing I can tell you about him and how he won us over a little bit this year is his ability to compete," Esmay said. "He's a strike thrower. He knows how to manipulate three types of pitches. He's not a one-pitch guy. He knows how to pitch around the zone. There's a lot of need for those guys because they come in and throw strikes. They pound the zone. They know how to make adjustments to hitters as the game goes along.

"And he did all that this fall. He just had the ability to go out and pitch and compete and make adjustments. I think a lot of guys need to understand that success at any level starts with being able to do that and he definitely has that.

"There's intangibles about people. Not everybody throws a 98-mile-an-hour fastball. Some guys had to learn how to pitch a little bit and that's what he's done. But his ability to compete and his ability to even be in this program right now through the route that he had to take to get here just tells you that there's something special about him inside that allows him to be successful."

Young is one of the few to make the Sun Devils as an unrecruited walk-on.

"The situation that he's in doesn't happen a lot and it obviously doesn't happen a lot at a program like Arizona State," Esmay said. "So it tells you a little something about his make-

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— ASU baseball coach Tim Esmay

up. There's more to him than just being able to have the talent to compete. He's got some other things in his makeup that allows him to be in the situation that he's in right now.

"He was told when he came in this fall that, 'We'll give you an opportunity but just to let you know it's a tough row. You're asking to walk on at a top three program in the country.'

"And from day one he's never acted like he doesn't belong here. A lot of times guys get here and they get overwhelmed by it as opposed to understanding that it is baseball. No matter where you play, the baseball's still round, the mound's the same distance, I think he learned pretty quick that just to survive here you have to throw all that other stuff out the window and just understand that

this is baseball and I've got to go out and do the best of my ability and not try to be somebody I'm not. He didn't come in here trying to be somebody he's not. He just tied to be Billy Young and so far it's been good for him. It's put him in this spot where he's at right now."

And where he's at right now is preparing for the Sun Devils' season-opening three-game series Feb. 17-19 at home against Western Michigan University.

"It's kind of a neat story right now that he's even in this program and he's preparing himself for the season opener," Esmay said. "Sometimes we like to tell these guys, 'Everybody has a different story or a different route sometimes how they get to things.' And his route's obviously has not been as straight as maybe some other guys in that clubhouse. But at the end of the day he's put himself in a spot to be a very viable member of this ball club this year and we're counting on him to have some big innings for us."

Young will get an opportunity to pitch this season or he wouldn't be on the team.

"The veteran guys have kind of earned their stripes, so to speak, so we're going to kind of evolve the pitching staff around them," Esmay said. "But then it's on the rest of those new guys to kind of see who follows them. Who is going to be a weekend starter or be a Tuesday, Wednesday mid-week starter?"

"And after that, who are the guys we're going to go to that are going to get innings in the middle of the game, guys we're going to ask to get outs in the sixth, seventh and eighth before

we get to our closer? And Billy's definitely in that mix. He's in that mix of still trying to put himself in a spot to be in the starting position but also in the spot to get some innings.

Show Low was 59-25 in Young's three varsity seasons. He was 15-4 in three seasons with the Cougars, going 4-2 with a 2.48 ERA and 38 strikeouts in 36 2/3 innings as a senior. He batted .432 as a team captain his final year and was selected to the Second Team 3A All-State and to the All-3A East First Team.

Show Low varsity coach David Nikolaus said Young put in the extraordinary effort academically, as well as mentally and physically, that it took to accomplish his goal.

"A lot of kids don't understand you have to have good grades, too, to get into certain schools," Nikolaus said. "Billy realized what it was going to take for him to achieve that. He deserves a lot of credit for sticking with his dreams.

"It's like a full-time job almost when get to that level and you have to decide how bad you really want it. He's shown us how much he wanted it. We're excited to see how he does."

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