

Former K-Stater competing for Royals job

By The Associated Press

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HAINES CITY, Fla. -- Craig Wilson holds an obscure major league record: highest batting average -- .468 -- for a player with at least 50 plate-appearances.

The Kansas State alumnus set the record in 1998 with the Chicago White Sox, who called him up in September for his first taste of the majors. Wilson played in 13 games, singled off Andy Pettitte in his first at-bat and had eight multi-hit games.

"It's kind of wild," Wilson said of his record.

The White Sox, however, released Wilson last November, but the Kansas City Royals promptly signed him to a minor league contract and invited him to spring training, where he is competing for a job as a utility player.

Wilson, who hit .416 his senior season at Kansas State, played on the 1992 Olympic team. He was drafted by the San Francisco Giants in the 23rd round after his junior season, but opted to return to college and play in the Olympics in Barcelona, Spain.

The White Sox selected Wilson in the 13th round in the 1992 draft and he signed. He had a .272 batting average in 139 games over three years with Chicago as a backup infielder.

"A few teams inquired about me after Chicago released me," Wilson said. "I make my home in Kansas City and I know most of the guys from working out with them during the winter.

"I wanted to go to a place that had a good shot at winning and where I'd have good teammates."

Wilson's back is better this year after undergoing surgery for a herniated disc in November. He was the White Sox starting third baseman when the 2000 season opened, but a bad back soon landed him on the disabled list and back in the minors.

"Last year I had a little stiffness in my back going into spring training," Wilson said.

It kept getting worse and Wilson was put on the disabled list on June 3 and was optioned July 13 to Class AAA Charlotte when he returned.

"It was painful to do anything I did in baseball," Wilson said. "I tried to play through it, but came to the realization I had to have something done."

Dr. Bob Watkins in Los Angeles performed the surgery.

"Some say he's the best back surgeon," Wilson said. "He's performed back surgery on (hockey great Wayne) Gretzky and (Tennessee Titans quarterback) Steve McNair. Now I can do things 10 times better than last year. I needed to get it taken care of."

Wilson played shortstop at Kansas State, but in the majors he has played more games at third base. He also has played second and first base. The Royals have even worked Wilson in left field.

"I can play all four infield positions and I'm taking balls in the outfield," Wilson said. "I've played in a couple of games in left field in the Class AAA. I think I can be an adequate left fielder. It's something if I work on, I think I can do."

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