

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

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Kirby St. John and MLB Broadcaster Harold Reynolds in 2016

Baseball and Video Games: How Triton Alumni Have Impacted MLB the Show

The NCAA canceled all championships on March 12. Major League Baseball is still on hold. For the average baseball fan, it's been a difficult couple of months to be without baseball on top of everything that is going on.

One game that has provided fans with the baseball fix they have been craving has been MLB the Show. UC San Diego baseball has a role in the success of the game thanks in part to its alumni that work on the game.

Kirby St. John graduated from UC San Diego in 2010 after a stellar four-year career on the baseball team as a Right-Handed Pitcher. St. John was searching for jobs after graduation and saw an opportunity to work with Sony on a sports game. Only later on in the interview process did he find out to his delight it was a baseball game. He accepted an internship, turned it into a full-time job and has been there ever since. A year later, his former teammate Kyle Saul was searching for a job and St. John pointed him in the direction of Sony.

St. John is a Senior Game Designer on MLB the Show. His main focus is working with broadcasters, but he also works on other production elements that make it feel like someone is actually watching the game. He has had the opportunity to work with many talented broadcasters from the MLB Network to ESPN and Fox. Current talent includes Matt Vasgersian, Dan Plesac, Mark DeRosa and Heidi Watney and former talent includes Harold Reynolds, Steve Lyons and Eric Karros. Saul works as a producer and works with game play designers and engineers to make it as realistic as possible.

The two former Tritons' experience as former baseball players have been crucial to their current jobs. Another role the duo has taken on is motion capture “acting” for the game. This involves everything from pitching motions, batting stances and bat flips to secret handshakes and facial emotions.

“When I’m working with broadcasters and working on a play, the knowledge (of baseball) is huge,” said St. John. “A lot of it is talking baseball and agreeing what we want to say on a given situation. I’m fortunate—on most days I’m thinking and talking about baseball.”

MLB the Show has been on the market since 1997, but this year’s game has seen an uptick in popularity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, fans have been clamoring for a taste of baseball, and MLB the Show has provided baseball fans with that outlet. Leagues and players around the country have live streamed games. ESPN and FOX Sports even televised the final games of the Players League Tournament at the beginning of May.



Kirby St. John



Geared up for motion-capture acting.

at Volcanoes Stadium.

“It’s been pretty incredible with everything going on in the world. Sports are usually those outlets; they’re a distraction,” said St. John. “We developed the game without knowing it (COVID-19) was going to happen. Our game released right when things were happening. Everybody was looking for ways to get baseball in their lives. It’s cool that the game has filled that void. I’ve heard a lot of people that have never played the game picked it up because they wanted to experience the sport. We were able to pivot really quickly and credit to the marketing team to get leagues going.”

St. John played baseball at UC San Diego during a time when the Tritons were starting to establish themselves not just as a powerhouse in the West, but in the country as well. His freshman year was the first year UC San Diego played in the NCAA tournament in the Division II era. One of his fondest memories with the team was his junior year in 2009 when the team won the West Region for the first time in the Division II era in Oregon



2009 Dogpile at Western Regionals

from that 2010 season still stand today.

About a decade later, and St. John and Saul are living a dream most baseball players can only imagine —making a career out of America’s pastime.

“Anytime you win and clinch your way to the world series, you don’t forget,” said St. John.

Fast-forward to senior year and St. John and his teammates found themselves in the National Championship game. A combination of talent, chemistry and the strong belief that their team could win the World Series helped get the 2010 team to the championship game. While that team did not win the World Series, it still ended up setting the precedent for teams to come. Even with the influx of talent that has come into the program over the last decade, 18 records

“It’s been an incredible journey, going to play college baseball in La Jolla to making a video game right across the freeway,” stated St. John. “I’m extremely grateful to have both those experiences.”

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