

Skenes, Davis, taken 1st overall two years apart

By Will Graves
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — From the moment they heard their names called out by Major League Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred, Paul Skenes and Henry Davis were destined to make history.

When it finally happened on Monday night in Pittsburgh's 10-3 win over Washington, the first battery comprised of players taken with the top overall pick in the draft just kind of shrugged.

"All records are meant to be broken, right?" Skenes said. "It's cool."
And also overdue.

While Skenes, selected first overall in 2023, has been a sensation from the moment he stepped onto the mound at PNC Park for the first time 11 months ago, Davis, the top pick in 2021, remains very much a work in progress.

It's telling of the wildly different trajectories of their respective careers that the history Skenes and Davis made in front of just over 10,000 fans on a windy spring night was unintentional.

Davis, recalled from Triple-A Indianapolis over the weekend after starting catcher Joey Bart experienced back issues, wasn't in the initial lineup and only entered the game after Endy Rodriguez sustained a cut on his right index finger just two batters into the top of the first.

Enter Davis, who quickly trotted onto the field, slipped a mask over his head and took a glimpse at the wristband that detailed Skenes' game plan. It was hardly the first time Davis had caught Skenes, just the first time that it truly mattered.

There appeared to be few hiccups between them. Skenes navigated six innings with relative ease, six days removed from the shakiest start of his still-young career. Mixing and matching a half-dozen pitches, Skenes retired 15 of 16 at one point, including a pair of groundouts against Nationals outfielder Dylan Crews that gave Skenes short-term bragging rights over his former LSU teammate.

Skenes made it a point to credit Davis, whose slow defensive development at one of the game's most demanding positions has been one of the main reasons why he has spent most of the last two years bouncing between

the majors and the minors.

"(Henry) can call a game," Skenes said after improving to 2-1. "He was prepared. It's not a surprise. I've been with him for the better part of two years now. You want to see why he's the type of player he is, you don't have to look very far. For him to come into a tough situation, call the game and catch as well as he did says a lot about it."

Preparation is never the issue with Davis, who tends to bury himself in his work. Yet that work has not led to results.

Davis entered Monday hitting just .188 in 101 games, and his inability to establish himself as an everyday player nearly four years after being drafted is symbolic of a franchise, that for all of its considerable young pitching talent, has been unable to identify and develop position players.

Pittsburgh's lineup against Washington's Brad Lord consisted of just three players who the club drafted or signed and then nurtured to the big leagues. And two of them — Andrew McCutchen and Adam Frazier — are on their second tour with the club after spending a portion of their careers elsewhere.

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