

# BIO

John Christopher “Chris” Stafford was born March 1, 1975, in Salisbury, North Carolina. Chris moved to Evans, Georgia near Augusta in elementary school with his father John, mother Jean, and younger brother Scott. Growing up he participated in baseball, soccer, football, and basketball. Chris started high school at Evans High School and played baseball and football as a freshman. Evans High School competed at the highest classification in Georgia.

Prior to the start of his sophomore year shoulder surgery forced him to sit out of football. Not being one to settle Chris ran cross-country that fall while rehabilitating his shoulder. By his junior year Chris was the most valuable runner on the cross-country team and played on the state championship baseball team despite experiencing additional injuries to his hand and Achilles tendon.

In the state championship series Evans beat Sprayberry High School in a 17-inning marathon game. Sprayberry’s starting pitcher was Chris Benson who later became the 1<sup>st</sup> overall pick in the major league baseball draft. Persevering through the frustration of injuries and not being able to perform at peak level had become an ongoing stressor for Stafford. During the summer, prior to his senior year, Chris met a man who had been in pro scouting and college coaching and had just taken the coaching job at Augusta Christian School.

Chris and his family decided for him to attend Augusta Christian School for his senior year. On the surface it did not make sense to a lot of people for a young man who wanted to play college baseball and then coach baseball to leave a school who had just won the state championship at the highest classification in Georgia to go to a small school that had never won even a region championship in any sport. It was a step of faith and Chris knew that this new coach had been put in his path for a reason. The coach began working with Chris and mentoring him on not only becoming the best player he could be but the best person he could be and the best coach he would one day be.

That year Augusta Christian won its first region championship and went on to be state runner-ups. Chris shared Co-MVP honors with eventual Houston Astros pitcher Donnie Thomas and both were named GISA ALL-State Players. In the all-state game Chris was able to play with several eventual professional players and current major league player Russell Branyan. However, the most important event that took place during his senior year was his decision to follow Christ. Chris saw first-hand how a coach can impact a player and knew that he wanted to use athletics as a tool to positively impact young people as well.

Following high school Chris pursued his degree in health and physical education while being on baseball scholarship at Shorter College and Andrew College. Continuing to battle through injuries (Achilles tendon, broken ankle, and broken wrist) helped him to develop mental toughness and perseverance but also taught him how to relate to players that may be dealing with tough circumstances. He believed that things (seemingly good or bad) happened for a reason and these injuries would make him a better person and a better coach if looked at with the right attitude. While in college, Chris was a starting catcher and hit third in the order. He was also named team captain and received the presidential handshake award for leadership from the president of the college while at Andrew.

Chris had the opportunity to play for two extremely successful high school baseball coaches and three different college coaches. This allowed him to experience several different coaching styles to draw from in his own career. After his playing career ended he transferred to the University of Georgia to finish his degree. While at UGA Chris did lessons with younger players on the weekends and coached his high school's summer team. After graduating in the fall Chris taught and assistant coached at his alma mater in the spring of 2000. During that semester Chris was offered the head coaching position at his alma mater for the following year and was also offered the opportunity to start a new program at North Cobb Christian School. After much prayer he felt God was leading him to get out of his comfort zone at home in Augusta and take the challenge of starting a new program in Cobb County.

During his time at North Cobb Christian School Coach Stafford has been very successful in winning multiple championships at the state and region level. As a result he has received coach of the year honors at the state and region level by multiple organizations. He has also expanded his program at a small K-12 private school to consist of two middle school teams, a junior varsity team, and a varsity team and made the transition from GISA to GHSA. During this period Coach Stafford has coached 42 senior baseball players and played a vital role in 27 of them furthering their academic and athletic careers at the college level. The vast majority of these players were not being recruited prior to Coach Stafford's involvement in the recruiting process.

Growing up it was a goal of Coach Stafford's and a challenge of his father's for him to earn a Master of Education degree. While teaching and coaching full time he met this challenge with a perfect 4.0 GPA in January of 2006. A few months later his team won its second state championship. And a few months later he married his wife Jacey Stafford. It was a great Year!

Coach Stafford founded STaF Athletics while at North Cobb Christian School as well. STaF is an acronym comprised of the words Sacrifice, Teamwork, and Faith, which are words used in a devotion he shared with his team in 2003. STaF Athletics is a Christian sports ministry founded to help young athletes reach their athletic goals while they grow in their walk with the Lord. STaF Athletics has played a role in helping nearly 100 high school players go on to play at the collegiate or professional level.

On August 11 of 2009 Stafford accepted the position of Head Baseball Coach at Marietta High School. He and his family are extremely excited to be blue devils. The future of STaF Athletics is unknown as Stafford and his partner Gil Navarro are committed to focusing on building the Marietta Blue Devil Baseball program. However, the process of running STaF Athletics has been very valuable in developing relationships with college coaches.

Chris is presently married to his wife Jacey Stafford who is a Registered Nurse at Kennestone Hospital. His daughter is Taylor and his son is Truitt.