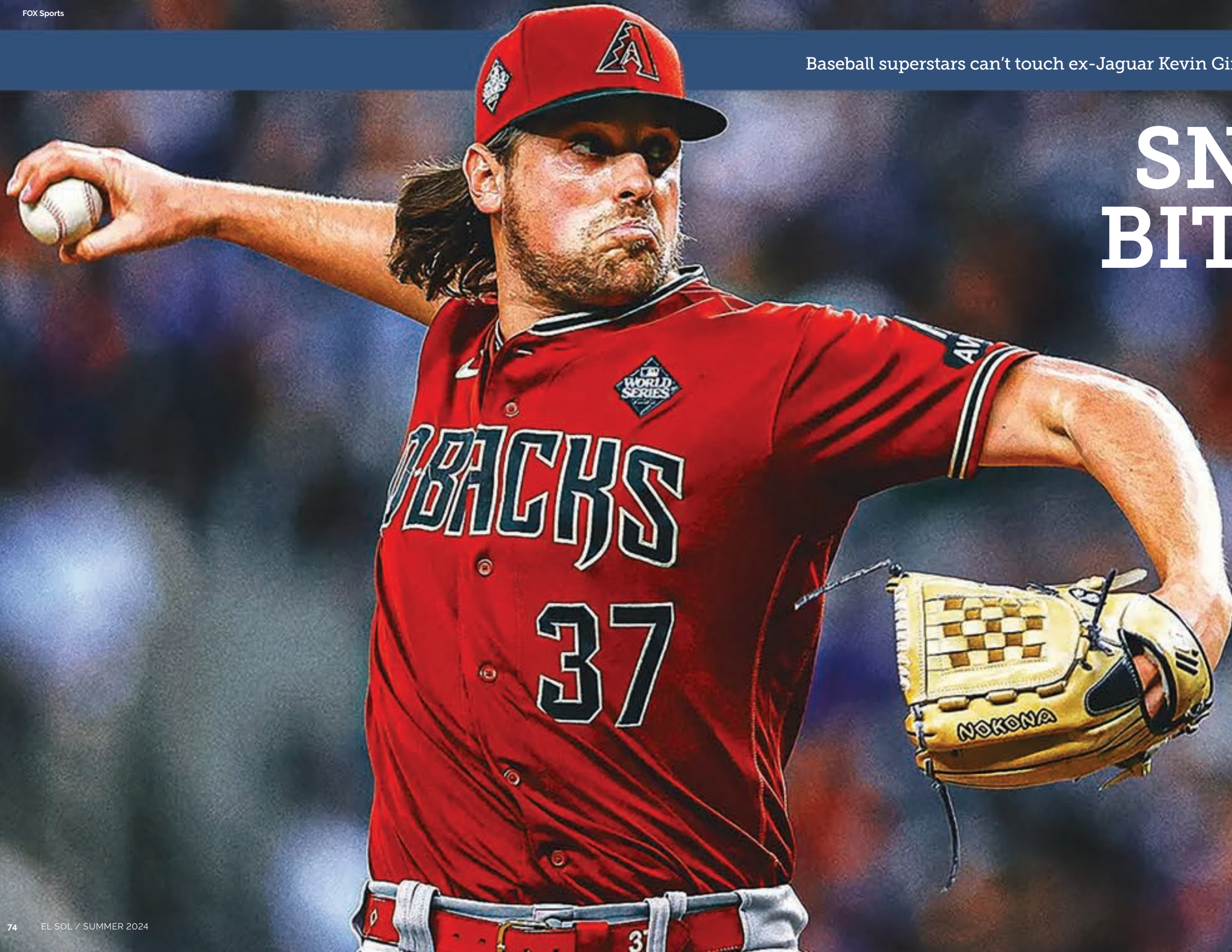


Baseball superstars can't touch ex-Jaguar Kevin Ginkel in the post-season

# SNAKE BITTEN





By Juan H. Estrada

# 'BOYHOOD DREAM COME TRUE'

Former Jaguar mows down Mookie Betts, Freddie Freeman, Trea Turner, Bryce Harper during clutch NLCS and World Series outings

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### FIRST JAGUAR TO PLAY IN THE WORLD SERIES

Ginkel was an SC Jaguar and University of Arizona Wildcat before becoming a top dog in the Arizona Diamondbacks bullpen this summer. He was nearly unhittable in the post-season.

evin Ginkel was warmed up and ready to go when he got the call from the bullpen. He sprinted to the mound as he had done more than 100 times before at El Capitan High School, Southwestern College, University of Arizona and for the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Only this time it was the eighth inning of Game One of the World Series.

The D-Backs were in a tight spot as the Texas Rangers had the go-ahead runners on.

Ginkel looked like it was a Spring Training exhibition, confident and loose, trying not to betray the fact that this was a boyhood dream come true.

He nodded yes to the sign as Texas Rangers fans at sold out Globe Life Field roared. From the stretch Ginkel raised his left leg so high his knee almost brushed the Arizona logo across his chest. A 93-mph sinking fastball shattered the bat of Josh Jung, producing a weak grounder to the shortstop who made the routine play. Inning over.

Another boyhood dream come true. "Looking back, this was a storybook year for me," he said this month on a zoom call from Arizona. "(Pitching in the World Series) is a blessing."

Back in late March Ginkel was not thinking of the World Series. He was focused on getting back to the Major Leagues after some arm ailments led to a pair of disappointing years. His 2023 began in the minors.

"From where I started this season--I was at AAA at one point—to playing World Series, that is incredible," he said.

Ginkel took a long and winding road to the Major Leagues. A standout at El



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**KEVIN GINKEL**  
*Diamondbacks Relief Pitcher*



Capitan High in Lakeside, he graduated with arm injuries and was not drafted. Rather than enroll at nearby Grossmont College he came to Southwestern and its pitching guru/manager Jay Martel. Ginkel arrived with a good attitude but a bad arm, Martel recalled.

“Kevin had bone chips in his elbow,” he said. “Doctors wanted him to change his mechanics and Ginkel’s a perfectionist on his mechanics. He worked hard to make changes and as the velocity came up, I foresaw him playing pro baseball.”

Ginkel found his groove at Southwestern and was drafted by the San Francisco Giants in 2014. He did not sign and accepted a scholarship to the University of Arizona. In 2015 Ginkel was drafted by the Boston Red Sox, but stayed for his senior year at U of A and had a memorable season. When the Diamond Backs drafted him in 2016 his professional career began.

His MLB debut came on August 5, 2019. He had a strong rookie season in 2020 but struggled in 2021 and 2022 before finding another gear in 2023. By mid-season he had become the Diamondbacks’ go to guy during late inning, high stakes situations.

Ginkel was nearly unhittable in the playoffs. During one nail-biting appearance against the Dodgers, he struck out All-Stars Mookie Betts and Freddie Freeman back-to-back.

One of the biggest moments of the playoffs came in Game 7 of the National League Championship Series. Ginkel sprinted into the game from the bullpen to face a Phillies rally with the game on the line. Philadelphia had the potential winning runs on base and superstars Trea Turner and Bryce Harper coming to bat. In the legendarily hostile confines of Citizens Bank Park, in a winner-takes-all scenario, Ginkel prepared to face a pair of MLB’s best hitters. He retired them both and preserved the lead and the win for Arizona. The D-Backs were going to the World Series.

“It was a special run for me,” he said. “I was so locked in. I went out there with the mentality that I can beat these guys, regardless of who they are. (I told myself) I’m really good, too. It’s game seven, these guys are making a trillion dollars and I’m the huge underdog here. They were expected to beat me and that fueled me.”

Phillie’s fans were loud as a jet roaring down the tarmac for takeoff, but Ginkel tuned it out.

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**JAY MARTEL**  
*SC Jaguars Head Coach*

“All these people don’t think I can do this,” he remembered thinking. “I believe I can.”

Ginkel prevailed over Turner and Harper to end the inning. He returned the following inning to strike out three hitters on 15 pitches.

“Reflecting on it now, it’s hit me a little bit more,” he said. “I’m just grateful (it turned out well).”

Ginkel said he tries to keep it simple.

“I just want to be recognized as someone that wins,” he said. “I take pride in that. I want to be recognized as someone who got the job done in crunch time.”

Martel said Ginkel was also a money pitcher at Southwestern.

“He threw a lot of big games for us,” Martel recalled. “He threw in the state playoffs and pitched a complete-game shutout against Rio Hondo College. He always wanted the ball. We had to practically force him out of the game sometimes.”

Rio Hondo is still a favorite memory, Ginkel said.

“That was a really cool game for me,” he said. “We were in the playoffs and the excitement of the first round on the road. It was fun. I went the full nine innings and we won.”

SC Athletic Director Ron Valenzuela said Ginkel is now part of the college’s legion of outstanding baseball alumni.

“We are extremely proud of the success and achievements of Kevin Ginkel both at and beyond Southwestern College,” he said. “Anything is possible at Southwestern College. If you want to play professionally, that can happen here.”

SC has sent almost 20 players to the Major Leagues, most under legendary former coach Jerry Bartow. Ginkel, though, is a trailblazer.

“Ginkel is the first Southwestern College baseball alum to pitch in the World Series,” said Valenzuela. “Him being on baseball’s biggest stage is a testament to the fact that Southwestern College is a place where a student-athlete’s dreams can come true.”

Ginkel agreed.

“If you have aspirations to do great things and go places, it’s all about the dream,” he said. “You must put in the time. Everybody wants to be the first-round draft pick, but there is a lot of pressure that comes with it. If you love it and want to pursue it, go for it. It is achievable.”

A brief pause, then one final pitch.

“I’d love to get another crack at the World Series.” ■

Yanelli Z. Robles contributed to this story.