

April 9, 1994----

HOOVER, Ala. Michael Jordan's magic is clear in the humble confines of Hoover Metropolitan Stadium near Birmingham.

He is the kid in us all.

The 31-year-old Jordan made his pro baseball debut in a twentysomething world before 10,359 fans Friday. He went 0-for-3, striking out twice. Thanks to seven Barons errors (none by Jordan), Birmingham lost 10-3 to the Chattanooga Lookouts.

"Most of the guys were a little nervous," Jordan said. "I sensed that as we played. I was more nervous yesterday (in the Windy City Classic at Wrigley Field ) than today. Sometimes you have nights like this."

After flying out to shallow right in his first at-bat, the fourth inning became Jordan's moment.

Lookouts designated hitter Cleveland Ladell led off the top of the inning with a sharp fly out to Jordan in right field. Catcher Jon Fuller followed with a soft fly that Jordan one-handed.

In all, Jordan had four putouts.

"Defensively, I thought I played everything the way I was supposed to," Jordan said. "I felt comfortable offensively. There's no short cut to the hitting business. My hand-eye coordination is pretty good, but it's trained to do other things. I'm trying to redirect them. It's harder than I thought."

With the Barons down 3-2, Jordan made the last out in the bottom of the fourth, stranding a runner on third. Lookouts starting lefty John Courtright brushed Jordan back high and tight. Jordan ran the count to 2-2 before striking out swinging.

"Before the game, the plan was to pitch him inside, but I got behind and threw him a lot of fastballs," Courtright said.

Said Jordan: "He caught me off-guard, and that's part of the experience he has over me."

In the seventh inning, Jordan was called out on a checked swing on the third strike after Courtright baffled him with curves.

In the dugout, Jordan sat alone on the far side of the bench, separated from his teammates by a security guard in a white shirt.

As Barons tradition dictates, two members of the Dixie Youth Baseball League ran out with Barons players as they were introduced.

Michael Gallses, a 12-year-old pitcher had the honor of pregame banter with Jordan.

"He told me good luck, and I told him not to give up," Gallses said. "Then he said he didn't like my shoes."

Gallses looked down and said, "They're made by Pony."

Of course, Jordan is a Nike man.

After the game Jordan compared his professional baseball debut to his professional basketball debut against the Washington Bullets at Chicago Stadium.

"I almost broke my neck in my first game in basketball," he said. "I went to the hole, and Jeff Ruland fouled me hard. It's the same thing as going 0-for-3. You try to bounce back. It's just one game out of 142."