

April 11, 1994---

HOOVER, Ala.--- Maybe Michael Jordan should have signed with the Cubs. The celebrated Southern League rookie got his first two professional baseball hits in the daylight Sunday at Hoover Metropolitan Stadium.

"This is a little bit better than my first NBA basket," Jordan said before taking on the Southern-style postgame team spread. "Everyone knew I would score at least two points in the NBA."

In fact, Jordan had half of the Class AA Birmingham Barons' hits as they lost to the Knoxville Smokies 7-1 before 7,520 fans. The Barons are 0-4.

Jordan is hitting .182 (2-for-11) and has struck out six times, but he's 2-for-4 in the daylight.

However, he says it doesn't make a difference.

"I picked the ball up last night as well as I did today," Jordan said Sunday. On Saturday, Jordan went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts.

"Today I tried not to have so many things on my mind. I tried to simplify it. Saturday I was thinking about too many things."

Jordan was so focused that the Braves-Dodgers game was on the television above his locker. Not the Masters. Not the NBA.

"I've watched more baseball now than ever in the past," Jordan said. "I always thought it was boring to watch. But you pick up a lot experiencing the game. I'm trying to educate myself."

Jordan got his first professional hit, a line drive to center, on a fastball from 26-year-old right-hander Joe Ganote.

The Smokies pitcher retrieved the ball and, with a smile, threw it into the Barons' dugout.

"I knew him," Jordan said. "I played golf with him in Sarasota." And Jordan won that match, too.

Jordan's second hit came in the seventh on a 1-2 changeup from lefty reliever Al Montoya. Again, Jordan drove the ball, this time to left field. Jordan grounded to short in his final at-bat in the ninth inning.

Sunday marked a definite improvement in Jordan's hitting. And it was something he spent the entire day, not just the game, working on.

Around the Alabama solace of noon Sunday, two hours before the game, Jordan took extra batting practice. Barons manager Terry Francona pitched to Jordan as Barons hitting coach Mike Barnett watched carefully.

Jordan had decided he needed extra work. Saturday night, he said: "I have to get back and believe in my fundamentals, so if things are not going right I have some foundation to fall back on. I've lost that."

White Sox minor league hitting coordinator Mike Lum was here to watch the Barons. He said the base hit will help Jordan's confidence.

"When you don't get your hits, it's very easy to get down," Lum said. "That's why some hitters are better hitters, because they're strong mentally. And I think Michael is."

Lum said Jordan crouches too low and leans out with the top half of his body. This conflicts with the celebrated Walt Hrniak style of keeping the head erect and dropping it only upon contact with the ball.

"We're trying to get him to stand taller with the top half so it does not lead," Lum said. "All hitters revert to what's natural in the game. He does well in batting practice, but he reverts in the game."

As Jordan digs in, it also seems he kicks his left knee in and out, applying a similar timing used to set up a golf stroke.

"Actually, he did have a habit in spring training where he would stride away from the plate," Lum said. "What Mike Barnett did was stride him back to square. We just have to get him to wait for the ball to get there because he wants to get out too soon."

Opposing teams have shown little respect for Jordan in their defensive schemes.

In games against the Barons Friday and Saturday, Chattanooga Lookouts manager Pat Kelly consistently brought his outfielders in to play Jordan shallow. It was probably the most conservative positioning given to a 6-6 hitter.

Defensively Jordan has been flawless in his first three games, recording seven putouts and holding Lookouts designated hitter Mark Merchant to a single by playing the ball off the wall Saturday night.

"Defense is holding me in there positively," he said. "It gives me something good to

think about and take from each day."