

BY JEFFREY LUTZ

The Wichita Eagle

Charles Poe saw Pete Rose Jr. on a baseball field for the first time in 1994 and barely had time to form a misconception.

To strangers, Rose's story was that of his father, Pete Rose, baseball's career hits leader who was banned from the sport in 1989 for gambling on games while managing the Cincinnati Reds.

There was no separating the men, no matter how different their journeys in the game might have been. With that in mind, Poe approached Rose Jr., his teammate with the Prince William (Va.) Cannons.

"I was a little shy about coming up to him," Poe said. "But I said, 'You know what, he has a uniform on just like I do. I'm going to introduce myself.' He was so down to earth. That persona of who his dad was, I'm sure me and a lot of other people were standoffish (toward) him. But he'd give you the shirt off his back, because that's the kind of guy he is."

Poe, a minor-league hitting coach, now counts Rose Jr. as his best friend. His story of meeting Rose Jr., who was hired in February to replace Kevin Hooper as Wingnuts manager, is one example of how Rose has found normalcy in situations others may deem exceptional.

"I tell everybody this - I'm just as normal as you are," Rose Jr. said. "I put my pants on one leg at a time, I tie my shoes one shoe at a time. The only difference with me and every other kid ... my dad's got more hits than anybody else's dad. That's it."

A COG IN THE MACHINE

Peter Edward Rose II - he never corrects people who call him "Junior" - was born in Cincinnati on Nov. 16, 1969. Forty-five days earli-