It would be easy to call Chris Madden lucky. At 8:30 each morning, he steps outside, takes a whiff of Pacific sea breezes, starts his car and commutes from his beachside Los Angeles apartment to his office—Dodger Stadium.

In the same building where former owner Walter O’Malley established the first West Coast MLB team in the ’60s, where Tommy Lasorda led the Dodgers to the World Series four times in the ’70s and ’80s, and where Vin Scully still calls each pitch after broadcasting 62 seasons, Madden rolls up his sleeves and sets to the task of building baseball’s future, one minor league rookie at a time.

Madden, STHM ’05, is the Los Angeles Dodgers’ senior manager of player development. He tends to a complex pipeline that takes in budding talent and churns out seasoned athletes ready for the big leagues.

Many of the athletes Madden works with are between 17 and 19 years old. Some come from other countries, such as the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Panama. They’ve often never before spent a night away from their families’ homes. Now they’re in Midland, Mich., or Glendale, Ariz., and a coach, who may not even speak their language, is preparing them to play the kind of baseball that will get them into the majors.

“My job is to help these players thrive off the field,” Madden said. “So they can focus on baseball.”

Madden and his colleagues in player development handle everything from connecting homesick teenage prodigies with host families, to guiding players through contract signings, to helping provide minor leaguers—and their families and spouses—with health insurance.

When a nervous rookie can step up to the plate with no worries beyond slamming the next pitch—Madden can call it a day.

The younger Chris Madden—a Temple student in 2001—would have thought of a Dodgers’ senior manager of player development as very, very lucky.

Back then, Madden had just quit the Owls football team, where he’d walked on in 1999 and even had a shot at a football scholarship. His eight-hour daily practice routine was gone, his grades were flagging, he had no major, and his career ambitions extended about as far as reading Moneyball.

So Madden sat down with his academic advisor, Karen Sofranko, for two hours and asked her to explain all of Temple’s majors to him. She did her best. But he was stuck on one idea: he wanted to be in baseball.

The business of baseball was getting a lot of play in the media. Theo Epstein, at age 28, had just become the youngest GM in baseball history, and “sabermetrics,” which used statistics to reinvent the scouting process, was giving the sport’s brainy business side a glamorous new image.

“I was an impressionable young college student,” Madden said. “So of course, I read about these great sports businessmen and thought, ‘Oh yeah—I could do that!’ ”

Hustle and Heart

To score in the Big Leagues, Chris Madden had to sacrifice.

By Carl O’Donnell