

A's News Clips, Thursday, December 17, 2009

New A's prospect Michael Taylor brings intelligence, potential

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune 12/17/09

The book on Michael Taylor says intelligence is one of his biggest strengths as a baseball player.

There was plenty of thought behind his response Wednesday when the newest member of the A's organization was asked whether he felt he was ready for the major leagues.

"You know, that's a tough question, because I think every player thinks they're ready," Taylor said on a media conference call. "I think you don't know until you're put in that situation and get enough at-bats at that level. I'd like the opportunity sooner rather than later."

His chance figures to come quickly.

The A's finalized the trade Wednesday that sent highly regarded third baseman Brett Wallace to Toronto for Taylor, a 6-foot-6, 250-pound outfielder whom the A's consider the total package as a prospect.

"We just think that not only is he a very good prospect and player now, he continues to get better each year," A's general manager Billy Beane said. "We think he's a potential monster talent."

Beane didn't rule out Taylor claiming a spot in the Opening-Day lineup, although he noted Taylor has just 30 Triple-A games under his belt.

Rajai Davis is the incumbent starter in center field, and Beane said Ryan Sweeney has a firm grasp in right. That means Taylor would have to win the starting job in left, where Scott Hairston sits atop the depth chart.

"We'll be open-minded going into the spring," Beane said. "It will be somewhat dependent on some of the other things we do."

Steve Compton, who represents free-agent outfielder Coco Crisp, said Wednesday that he's talked with the A's regarding Crisp, who is coming off surgery on both shoulders that sabotaged his 2009 season. San Diego reportedly is interested in Crisp as well.

Taylor, who played collegiately at Stanford, spent two-plus years in the Philadelphia Phillies organization. The Phillies sent Taylor to Toronto as part of the package that netted pitcher Roy Halladay on Wednesday.

Taylor was ranked No. 23 on Baseball America's 2009 midseason list of top prospects (Wallace was 21st). ESPN's Tim Kurkjian reported that a scout told him Taylor was the best minor league player he saw last season.

But some wonder if Taylor, who turns 24 on Saturday, will hit for the power that his physique suggests he's capable of. He had 20 homers in 2009, split between Double-A and Triple-A, and hit 19 at Single-A in 2008.

He's batted .312 in 314 minor league games.

"I know one of the knocks on me is I'm not a 40- to 50-homer guy," said Taylor, who hits and throws right-handed. "But I do a little bit of everything. I can put the ball in play and get a run home, take the extra base or score on a ball when another guy might not. I do things that help the team win."

He's also overcome a fairly large obstacle — playing professional baseball while suffering from Type 1 diabetes.

"It's a daily thing. I check my blood sugar, give myself insulin for any kind of carbohydrate I take, and stay on top of it," Taylor said. "I try to stay away from complicated foods, and make sure when (the) game starts, I'm in my best condition to play."

With Wallace no longer an option at third, the A's are considering moving second-base prospect Adrian Cardenas to third on a full-time basis.

The A's also made a strong pitch for free-agent infielder Jamey Carroll, who agreed to a two-year \$3.85 million deal with the Dodgers on Wednesday. [Foxsports.com](http://foxsports.com) reported that the A's offered more money but that Carroll liked the idea of playing on a coaching staff with Joe Torre and Don Mattingly.

Ex-Stanford outfielder 'a stud'

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer 12/17/09

Former Stanford outfielder Michael Taylor officially joined the A's on Wednesday, coming to Oakland as part of the four-team deal in which All-Star starter Roy Halladay went to the Phillies and Cliff Lee to the Mariners.

Oakland shipped corner infielder Brett Wallace to Toronto as part of the trade, and in return, got one of the best all-around prospects in the game.

"Michael is a stud, for lack of a better word," said Triple-A Sacramento infielder Adrian Cardenas, who played in the Philadelphia system with Taylor. "He's just a great player and very passionate about the game."

The A's had attempted to land Taylor last summer before getting Wallace in the Matt Holliday trade. Assistant general manager David Forst said that Wallace did nothing to make the A's like him less but that the team had many young corner infielders.

According to Forst, Taylor will have "every opportunity to compete" for a big-league job in the spring.

"Obviously, this trade gives me the chance to go out there and hopefully show what I can do and earn a spot," said Taylor, who turns 24 on Saturday.

At 6-foot-6, 250 pounds, Taylor is "a little unique," he said. "I'm not going to hit 40-50 home runs but I do a little bit of everything."

He has drawn comparisons to a young Jermaine Dye, and Forst said that Taylor projects to be above average in every facet of the game.

Taylor is a Type 1 diabetic, a condition he handles that with blood-sugar testing, careful eating and insulin injections. Forst said that the A's have no concerns about the diabetes.

Cardenas is now slated to play third rather than second. He got his first experience there last year and said he enjoyed it ... for the most part.

"There were a few times I was a little scared," Cardenas said. "I'm creeping up and creeping up and the coach is signaling me to go in four more steps. I'm like, 'Are you kidding me?' "

The A's will be among the teams making offers for Cuban left-hander Aroldis Chapman, who was impressive in a showcase Tuesday in Houston.

Michael Taylor's reactions to the trade

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 12/16/09

Michael Taylor played college baseball about 40 minutes from the Coliseum, so he said he's excited to be coming back to the Bay Area as part of the multi-team Roy Halladay/Cliff Lee deal.

"I spent three years out there," the former Stanford outfielder said on a just-completed conference call. "I'm very fond of the area."

Then he added with a laugh, "I've always said it's a place I'd like to eventually live - if I can afford it."

Taylor won't have to worry about that if the projections are correct; many talent evaluators, including scouts and media analysts, say that he had the best overall season of any position player in the minors last year.

I asked Taylor if he can compare himself to any particular player and he responded that he's a little unique because he's so big (6 foot 6, 250 pounds) but he's not strictly a power hitter; he can run, too, and take the extra base, move runners over - the little stuff along with hitting the occasional homer.

When I said that sounded a little like the young Jermaine Dye, Taylor said he hears that comparison a lot, and if he can have a career anything like Dye's, he'd be thrilled.

When I asked if he believes he's major-league ready, Taylor said that most players would like to think that, but he'll have to prove it when given the opportunity. From what I'm hearing, he will get every opportunity during the spring, so I'm sure he will be one of the most central stories in Phoenix in two months.

There were those rumblings today about someone in the multi-team trade failing a physical, which was discounted by my sources, and Taylor said he'd heard that report but then he got the call from the A's soon afterward so he knew it was bogus.

"I figured if they were setting up this (conference call), it couldn't be that serious," he said. "A trade with this many moving parts, I figured there would be some mistruths that would come out, but I'd never heard anything from a credible source with inside information."

Taylor has Type 1 diabetes, and he said he has a program that works for him, but he does have to be careful about what he eats, he tests his blood sugar and he administers insulin. There have been numerous top-tier athletes with Type 1 diabetes, and the A's are not concerned about it, but they will be absolutely cognizant of the condition.

A's finalize Wallace-for-Taylor trade

By Mychael Urban, *CSNBayArea.com* 12/16/09

In a deal that represents the exchange of hope for what several big-league scouts referred to as a "sure thing," the A's on Wednesday completed a swap of top prospects, sending infielder Brett Wallace to the Blue Jays for slugging corner outfielder Michael Taylor.

Wallace, the centerpiece of the July trade that sent Matt Holliday from Oakland to the Cardinals, spent the rest of the 2009 season at third base for Triple-A Sacramento, where he batted .302 with nine home runs and 28 RBIs in 44 games. His defensive work, however, raised questions about his long-term future at the position.

Taylor, a product of Stanford University, was acquired by the Blue Jays earlier Wednesday as part of the three-team blockbuster that sent Cliff Lee from Philadelphia to Seattle, and send Roy Halladay from Toronto to Philly. Taylor, who turns 24 on Saturday, entered the 2009 season ranked by *Baseball America* as the Phillies' top power-hitting prospect, and he justified the ranking by batting .320 with 20 home runs among his 53 extra-base hits, 84 RBIs, 21 stolen bases, a .383 on-base percentage and an .898 OPS in 116 games at Double-A Reading and Triple-A Lehigh Valley.

"Wallace can flat-out rake; don't get me wrong -- he's a hell of a hitting prospect, and he's close to ready for the big leagues with the bat right now," an American League scout told CSNBay Area.com on Wednesday morning. "But he's not going to be a third baseman in the big leagues. He's going to be a first baseman or a DH, and the A's are loaded with those types of guys, starting with (two-time organizational player of the year) Chris Carter, who's about ready for the big leagues himself. Taylor, though, is a more complete, well-rounded player than both of those guys, and he fills a need in Oakland.

"He's a corner [outfield] guy who can run, play good D, hit, hit for big power and get on base. He's ready for the big leagues on a team like Oakland, too, no question in my mind. He's the surest thing of the lot, and within a couple years, with Carter and Taylor in the middle of that lineup and with that nice young pitching staff, (A's general manager) Billy Beane is going to be looking like the genius everyone says he is again."

Billy Owens, Oakland's director of player personnel, was reluctant to weigh in on Wallace's perceived shortcomings at the hot corner, preferring to focus -- quite enthusiastically -- on the player coming to Oakland rather than on the player leaving.

"It's a pretty exciting day for the A's, for sure," Owens told CNSBayArea.com. "This all started last summer, actually. The Phillies called on Holliday, so Billy sent me out to watch Taylor, and right away I was blown away by the physicality. He looked like an all-pro NFL tight end. This is a guy who'd adept on both sides of the ball. It looked like he cared defensively; he's got an outstanding throwing arm in the outfield, and he overpowers you with line drives. Uses the whole field, has a basic, relaxed stance, and with the type of swing that he has, we believe his power will manifest itself at the big-league level.

"The Blue Jays got a quality person and they got a hell of a hitter; (Wallace) is a very good hitter, with the physicality to hit for power at the Major League level. As far as his defensive destination, that's probably not totally decided. It depends on what they need up there. This wasn't a deal where we had any doubts about what Brett can do. ... Taylor just fits our configuration (better)."

A fifth-round pick of the Phillies in the 2007 draft, Taylor will be in big-league spring training with Oakland. Asked if he had a shot at breaking camp with the club, Owens certainly didn't rule it out.

"Not to put a timetable on him, but he dominated Double-A, he was very good in Triple-A, and this winter he went to Mexico to see some more breaking balls and hit over .300 there, as well," Owens offered. "He's a mature kid, and we're more than elated to have him. ... With the configuration of our team, I don't think we're in a position to hold anyone back. The sky's the limit with this guy."

David Forst, Beane's assistant GM, generally echoed Owens' characterization of the deal.

"This was certainly a deal where both teams are getting quality prospects, and most likely quality Major League players," Forst told CSNBayArea.com. "It wasn't that we saw anything about Bret that we didn't like in his two months with us after the Holliday trade, but Taylor was a player we had liked just as much, and from an organizational standpoint, he fits better."

Carter, whom A's director of player development Keith Lieppman referred to as a "work in progress" defensively at first base, also will be in big-league camp, and Lieppman last week told CSNBayArea.com that Carter would spend some time at camp working out in the outfield. Forst on Wednesday said the acquisition of Taylor doesn't change that plan.

"I don't think we're going to take that away from Chris at this point," Forst said. "It's still a skill we'd like him to have."

As for third base, Forst chuckled when it was suggested that the loss of Wallace appears to make recently acquired infielder Jake Fox the starting third baseman for the time being.

"If the season were to start today," Forst said, "Eric Chavez is feeling very good right now."

Chavez, a six-time Gold Glove at the hot corner, is coming off his second major back surgery and hasn't played a full season since 2006, when he appeared in 137 games.

"The reality is that we don't have to start the season right now," Forst said. "We're two months before we go to Phoenix (for spring training), and there are some other possibilities we're exploring."

Fox has played in the outfield, at first and third base, and behind the plate during his three seasons in the bigs.

"No one has used him as an every day third baseman," Forst said. "But we feel like it's part of his game. We feel like he could fill in there if need be, yes."

Should Chavez not be ready to play by the start of the season, the A's might be tempted to rush infield prospect Adrian Cardenas, who was drafted as a middle infielder but is being moved to third base this spring. With the recent parting of ways with Jack Cust, the A's figure to use Fox quite a bit at DH.

San Jose group forms to fight A's stadium

Sacramento Business Journal 12/16/09

A group backed by the **San Francisco Giants** minor league team in San Jose is expected to launch a campaign Wednesday against using city money for an Oakland Athletics stadium.

The group met with San Jose Giants president Jim Weyerman Monday night at Municipal Stadium to discuss strategy.

The minor league team is 25 percent owned by the San Francisco Giants, who oppose an A's move to San Jose because the city is in the official territory assigned to the Giants by Major League Baseball.

The Oakland A's are the major league affiliate of the **Sacramento River Cats**.

The local group is expected to argue that taxpayer money shouldn't be diverted from other uses, an argument that Mayor Chuck Reed and other city leaders say is misleading.

The guiding principles established by the city call for the A's to shoulder the cost of financing and building a stadium as well as all operating costs. The city would donate the land and pay for some infrastructure improvements around the proposed ballpark site near the Diridon train station.

The opposition group is surfacing as the city prepares for a "scoping meeting" Wednesday night in which the environmental impact report on the proposed stadium is scheduled to be discussed.

Editorial: A's welcome to San Jose, assuming a limited public investment

Mercury News Editorial 12/17/09

A group of San Jose Giants fans is organizing to oppose a possible A's baseball stadium downtown, worried their team will move out if the A's move in. They object to a city report they say minimizes traffic and other concerns and to what they consider an unwise use of public funds.

Leaving aside that the effort appears more AstroTurf than grass-roots — it's fairly clear the San Francisco Giants, who claim territorial rights to Santa Clara County, are behind the fan group — losing the minor league team would be a blow. But a deal to bring the A's to San Jose wouldn't automatically force the Little Giants to move; it would be up to the team and its big-league parent to decide whether it wanted to stay.

We, too, support only a modest investment of public money, one that would bring tangible economic benefits, such as more hours for workers at downtown restaurants. But everyone — supporters, opponents and those on the fence — ought to wait to see what kind of deal the city works out with A's owner Lew Wolff before passing judgment. City leaders have pledged not to use public funds on stadium construction or maintenance, and they could negotiate a fair price for the land on which a stadium would sit. Once a deal is in place, voters will decide whether they think a stadium is worth the cost.

All of that, of course, assumes the Major League Baseball committee presently examining the A's options backs the move to San Jose, and that three-quarters of baseball owners vote for it — no sure thing.

The Giants group appears to be presenting this as a choice between the two teams. We love the small-town feel, the tri-tip sandwiches, the beer batter — and the affordable ticket prices — at San Jose Giants games. But the A's would bring hundreds of new jobs, tens of millions in spending and incalculable cachet to San Jose. Assuming a limited public investment, the choice is obvious.