

A's News Clips, St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 2010

Michael Taylor of the Oakland A's plays through Type 1 diabetes

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Michael Taylor receives the occasional letter from parents who thank him for being an inspiration to their child.

They're not talking about Taylor being one of the major leagues' top prospects.

The A's outfielder is paving his way to the big leagues while battling Type 1 diabetes, a condition Taylor was diagnosed with at age 9.

Before he hits the field every morning, Taylor pricks his finger to draw blood and measure his blood-sugar level. Then he injects himself with a shot of insulin, an exercise he repeats five or six times daily.

That's the laborious part of dealing with a disease that affects up to 3 million Americans.

The payoff comes when he talks to children with diabetes and sees their faces light up as his message sinks in: Being diabetic doesn't mean you can't live a normal life, or even be a professional athlete.

"That's the coolest part about this experience," Taylor, 24, said.

One glance at Taylor shows why the A's were enamored with the former Stanford star. He's listed at 6-foot-6, 260 pounds, and he combines that size with speed and surprising agility.

The A's traded highly regarded third base prospect Brett Wallace to Toronto for Taylor on Dec. 16, immediately after Taylor had been dealt from Philadelphia to Toronto as part of the Roy Halladay trade.

Baseball America ranks Taylor as the majors' No. 29 overall prospect, one spot behind teammate Chris Carter.

"He's got brute strength, athleticism and he defends well," A's director of player personnel Billy Owens said recently. "Not to use too much hyperbole, but in a perfect world, he could be a right-handed hitting Dave Parker."

Taylor's imposing presence gives no indication of the steps required to maintain his health.

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease in which the body doesn't produce enough insulin, the hormone that helps regulate the amount of sugars and carbohydrates in the blood.

Taylor must be mindful of his diet, which is tough in the minor leagues when the clubhouse spreads aren't always the healthiest.

He tries to eat a full two hours before a game so he can gauge how his body is reacting.

"You're not going to see me eat five or six pancakes before a game," he said. "Pasta, I don't eat that before the game. Any kind of grilled chicken or vegetables would be great because there's not a lot of carbs. You don't need a whole lot of insulin."

But there's no guarantee how his body will feel during a game. He can be nauseous or sluggish at times, he said, or his vision can get blurry.

A's assistant general manager David Forst said the A's consulted thoroughly with the Phillies' medical and training staffs before swinging the deal to get Taylor from the Blue Jays.

"They immediately said he's as good as anybody they've seen as far as controlling and monitoring (his condition), so we felt pretty good about it," Forst said.

After Taylor was diagnosed as a child, his parents, David and Sheryl, presented him a list of noteworthy people who were diabetic.

The group included baseball legend Jackie Robinson, basketball Hall of Famer Walt Frazier and author Ernest Hemingway.

"This is something that can be handled," David Taylor says now of the intended message. "Don't take the perception that may be passed along to you by those who don't have the tools or information at their disposal."

Last season, Taylor was playing a road game with Double-A Reading (Pa.) and he spent 20 minutes after the game talking with a young fan who was diabetic and heard Taylor was too.

Taylor dispensed similar wisdom his parents had given him.

"You can do anything," he said. "That's a cliché, but it's true. (Diabetes) shouldn't be a hindrance, especially in this day and age."

Notes: After Tuesday's day off, the A's host the Giants today in Phoenix with Brett Anderson drawing the start for Oakland. ... Forst confirmed the A's were on the verge of signing right-hander Michael Feliz out of the Dominican Republic. But Feliz tested positive for a performance-enhancing substance and the deal was voided.

A's Michael Ynoa makes good first impression

John Shea, CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The A's had no game on Tuesday, so manager **Bob Geren** and pitching coach **Curt Young** visited the team's minor-league camp because **Dallas Braden** was scheduled to pitch in a minor-league intrasquad game.

They got a bonus, baby.

After Braden threw four innings, Geren and Young moved to an adjacent field to watch 6-foot-7 **Michael Ynoa**, 18, who signed with the A's at 16 for \$4.25 million. Ynoa, who missed last season with an elbow ailment, threw in a game situation for the first time in spring training and came away feeling fine physically.

"When I heard he was pitching, it was a good day," Young said.

Ynoa was summoned in mid-game, creating a buzz around the vast Papago Park complex. Several team officials and dozens of players hurried to Ynoa's field to get a glimpse of the kid's stuff.

He threw 20 pitches, showing a smooth delivery and decent movement, but was a bit wild, walking his first two batters on 3-2 pitches (one a curve) and hitting another batter.

"My first time, and I feel good," Ynoa said. "I'll be looking for more control, then I'll be happy."

The A's, relieved Ynoa is healthy, won't rush the teenager. He'll probably stay in Arizona for extended spring training when the minor-league seasons begin. Director of player development **Keith Lieppman** said Ynoa could be limited to 75 to 100 innings this year.

"You're going to see him advance and get better every year and get bigger and stronger," Young said of Ynoa, who's listed at 210 pounds. "He's definitely projected to reach the major-league level."

Ynoa likes the sound of that. Asked if he has a timetable to reach the majors, Ynoa said, "Two years. I want to work to be there in two years, 2012."

He'd be 21 by the end of the 2012 season. A's pitchers **Brett Anderson** and **Trevor Cahill** were 21 when breaking into the majors last season.

"With his arm, he's ahead of the curve," Young said. "But by his age, he's going to have to go step by step."

Briefly: Braden, projected as the No. 2 starter behind **Ben Sheets**, threw 63 pitches and was pleased with his cut fastball, which he wants to throw more in 2010. "It's a little trick, another little tool. It's for contact," Braden said. "Last year, it was an entry-level pitch, something I threw when I wouldn't hurt myself or the team. This year, it's going to play a more important role." ... **Justin Duchscherer** and **Michael Wuertz** will pitch in a minor-league intrasquad game today. **Joey Devine** is to play catch for the first time in a week.

Drumbeat: Michael Ynoa's long-awaited return to mound

John Shea reporting from the A's minor-league camp . . .

Michael Ynoa, one of the game's elite pitching prospects, threw 20 pitches in a minor-league intrasquad game today. It was his first game situation in spring training after he missed the entire 2009 season with an elbow ailment.

Ynoa is 18 and 6-foot-7. He signed out of the Dominican Republic for \$4.25 million in July 2008 when he was 16.

"With his arm, he's ahead of the curve. But by his age, he's going to have to go step by step," pitching coach Curt Young said after watching Ynoa throw at the team's minor-league complex.

Ynoa was a bit wild. He walked two batters on 3-2 pitches (one a curve) and hit a batter.

"My first time, and I feel good," Ynoa said in an interview with the Chronicle. "I'll be looking for more control, then I'll be happy."

Team officials were impressed with Ynoa's smooth delivery and movement and aren't rushing the teenager. He'll likely stay in Arizona for extended spring training when the minor-league seasons begin.

"You're going to see him advance and get better every year and get bigger and stronger," Young said. "He's definitely projected to reach the major-league level."

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He'd be 20 by then. A's pitchers Brett Anderson and Trevor Cahill were 21 when breaking into the majors last season.

The A's don't play today, so Dallas Braden, projected as the No. 2 starter behind Ben Sheets, threw 63 pitches in four innings in an intrasquad game.

Ellis remains constant amid A's changes

Veteran second baseman embracing role as club leader

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

PHOENIX -- Mark Ellis still sports the same boyish look he brought with him to the A's clubhouse upon his arrival in 2002.

It was that same year during which the 25-year-old kid, traded along with Johnny Damon from Kansas City a year before, made his Major League debut. It was also that same year former Oakland outfielder David Justice lent him a warning.

"My first week in the big leagues, he told me, 'One day you're going to look up and 12 years will have gone by,'" Ellis recalled. "It hasn't been 12, but it's been close, and it's all gone by so fast."

Also gone are plenty of teammates who have walked through Oakland's revolving door. Yet Ellis, aside from the often-injured Eric Chavez, has remained the team's lone steady presence through it all. An average career batting mark, a top-notch glove and decent power have made for quite the bargain for the A's, who are paying Ellis \$5.5 million -- the most he's ever made -- this season.

He's been on first-place teams, last-place teams and every team in between. He's racked up the most games played by an Oakland second baseman (846) and has led the American League in fielding more than once.

However, you won't see Ellis' name on a Gold Glove Award. Perhaps it is East Coast bias and batting average theories that have left the A's second baseman in the dust every season. Anyone in the A's clubhouse will say he is one of the most underrated defensive players in the game, but they'll also say he's one of the most respected.

That, said A's bench coach Tye Waller, comes from Ellis' ability to be a student, teacher, teammate and friend all at once.

"Back when I came up," said Waller, "you were always being tutored by the leaders on the club. Now guys come and go every one or two years, but because Mark has been here so long and has had the success he's had with the A's, the others can look up to him as a guy who knows what it takes to be successful here. He has the respect of everyone on this club."

Said reverence comes with time. And Ellis knows he's put in that time. In fact, the A's veteran currently represents the team's oldest player at the ripe age of 32.

"When you think about it," said a smiling Chavez, "that doesn't just make him the oldest player here, but that makes him the oldest player in the organization.

"I don't want that title. I'm glad he has it."

Ellis wears the title well, though. And he can't help but laugh when thinking of how many times Chavez -- who is just six months younger -- has reminded him of it.

Only Chavez, who made his debut for the A's in 1998, has been with the team longer than Ellis. But the six-time Gold Glove third baseman has played in only 121 games during the past three seasons while Ellis has appeared in 372.

His presence at second base, which was missing during the 2004 season due to a dislocated right shoulder, has now become one of the only sure things in Oakland, where players are constantly on the move. On Monday, he noticed former A's shortstop Orlando Cabrera's name in the Reds lineup and on Wednesday, he'll face former teammate Barry Zito before catching up with ex-A's pitcher Dan Haren when the Diamondbacks come to town Thursday.

Call it the norm, he says.

"It's nice to be able to still see all these guys," Ellis said, "but it's a little strange. There's times when it's really tough, because you've been with these guys and they're not only teammates but friends. At the same time, you get to meet new people and build new relationships pretty easily here.

Highest Fielding % by a Second Baseman in MLB History (Minimum 750 games at the position)

Fielding Pct.	Player
0.99267	Placido Polanco, 1998-present
0.9894	Ryne Sandberg, 1981-1997
0.98938	Mark Ellis, 2002-present
0.98904	Mark Loretta, 1995-2009
0.98901	Tom Herr, 1979-1991

"I think in a perfect world everyone would have their nine guys out there who they'd like to play with every year, but that's just how baseball is. It's how it is throughout the league and probably a little more here, but it's the way it goes."

Ellis is in the final year of a two-year contract but has a club option for 2011. And even though everyone around him in Oakland is seemingly getting younger, he wouldn't mind getting older while playing alongside them. He became a free agent following the 2008 season but never really bothered looking elsewhere.

"I love it here," Ellis said. "I obviously went through the same deal with my contract a couple years ago and chose to stay here. We're very comfortable here. It's a great place, and the team is moving in the right direction. That's ideal for me."

An extension is also ideal for his family. Young kids Briggs and Adelaide have only ever known the Bay Area, and Ellis and his wife, Sarah, relish the opportunity to visit the same doctors and grocery stores while also staying connected to the same neighbors and friends.

"I try not to think about it too much," Ellis said. "But if that time to leave here ever comes, whether through retirement or going to a different team, that's going to be tough."

The boyish look may gradually disappear in the coming years, but Ellis insists that no matter his age or location, his constant love and dedication for the game will always join him for the ride.

"I just want to stay on the field and play as many games as I can and win as many games as I can," he said. "Nothing in this game is guaranteed."

Nothing, says Waller, except Ellis' daily work ethic.

"Mark, from Day 1, has brought a sense of professionalism," he said. "The way he goes about his work, how he interacts with the team, it's a special thing. He pours so much into his teammates, and he's always there with that leadership that can bring these guys to another level."

The curious case of Travis Buck

By HARRELL MILLER, Napa Valley Register

PHOENIX — For the Boys of Summer who come to Arizona in the spring, the dream is always the same.

The games of Spring Training will play out, and they will have so impressed their manager and coaches that they will be among their franchise's talented 25 headed for The Show as a genuine, bonafide major league baseball player.

Of course for the veterans, it's more of an expectation than a dream.

But, for the majority of the players who come to spring training, it's a dream — one that's been around since T-ball and Little League and Babe Ruth and high school and American Legion and college. And now, in the warm Arizona sun, it's a dream that has a real chance of coming true.

However, in the wonderful world of professional baseball, the big league dream is one from which the dreamer is ever in danger of waking up. Being on the bus to Oakland or San Francisco or Los Angeles or Seattle or San Diego or any other city where The Show is about to open has no guarantees. Those mythical buses run both directions.

Nobody knows this better than Oakland's Travis Buck.

Travis has had his name on a baseball contract since 2005 when, after three spectacular years with the Sun Devils of Arizona State University, he signed with the Athletics and headed for a quick trip up Oakland's minor league ladder. He played nine games in Vancouver and 32 games in Kane County his first year.

He was in Stockton for 34 games and Midland, Texas for 50 during his second year.

He began his third professional baseball year in spring training where, for Travis, the dream came true. When camp broke up that spring, he found himself on the way to the Bay Area with 24 other players who would be the 2007 Oakland Athletics.

Travis had played the game at every level starting with T-Ball in Richland, Washington. He had two older brothers and a dad who spent their summers at one ballpark or another in Richland.

He was so good in high school and Legion ball that the Seattle Mariners offered him a contract in the 23rd round of the First-Year Player Draft in 2002.

He decided, however, that he wasn't ready for the personal demands of professional baseball, and began sifting through college offers that were coming from teams up and down the West Coast.

He had always liked Arizona State University in Tempe, and so far as he knew, they liked him. But, the summer began slipping away with no offer from the Sun Devils. He was on the verge of committing to the University of Washington when the ASU coach called and invited him to Arizona.

It was love at first sight.

He had always played shortstop, but, if he was going to play as a freshman, he needed to become an outfielder. He agreed.

We talked about his change from the infield to the outfield last week.

He had some interesting observations.

Chavez, Sheets relish chance to provide A's a healthy boost

By [Bob Nightengale](#), USA TODAY

PHOENIX — Last year was their first summer vacation since they were kids, and [Eric Chavez](#) and [Ben Sheets](#) hated it.

They sat home, watched hours of games on TV and wondered whether they would ever play again.

Their minds were telling them yes, but their bodies were saying no.

NEW GLOVE: [Chavez ready to play shortstop](#)

"You couldn't help but think about it," says Chavez, a six-time Gold Glove third baseman. "(Sheets) talked about it. We've both been thinking about it, but we weren't ready to stop.

"The difference now is that you don't take anything for granted. We're not 22 anymore. Every time I step on the field now, I view it as 'last time.' But I'm going to give this everything I have.

"We both are."

Chavez, 32, and Sheets, 31, still are young men, but their bodies have been ravaged by injuries. Chavez, who played just eight games last season after season-ending back surgery, has played in only 121 games the past three years. Sheets, a right-handed starting pitcher and four-time All-Star, is still of last year recovering from elbow surgery. He's made more than 30 starts just once since 2004.

Together with the [Oakland A's](#), they are hoping this is the new chapter to their careers and not the end.

"We're both young guys, but in this clubhouse," Sheets says, "we're old. I feel good, but that's not to say there hasn't been mornings when I feel like I'm not ready."

"I knew I wanted to keep playing this game, but it's up to your body. Your body tells you when it's time to stop."

Sheets, hoping to return to the big leagues last summer but unable to recover quickly enough from surgery, proved to scouts during spring training that he was healthy again. The A's took the gamble and signed him to a one-year, \$10 million contract.

Now, they are holding their breath, wanting to believe that Sheets' dreadful spring stats simply are a result of a year-long layoff. Sheets is throwing 91 to 93 mph, but he also is yielding a 31.15 ERA. He has given up 17 hits and 18 runs (15 earned) in just 4 1/3 innings. Chavez, who gave up 10 runs, nine earned, without recording an out against the [Cincinnati Reds](#).

"I know people have had bad springs," Sheet told news reporters, "but this is taking it to a whole new level."

Said A's general manager [Billy Beane](#): "He tipped us off and told us early that he doesn't have a particularly good spring training. He's been undersold that a little bit.

"He still has to shake off some rust. But he's healthy and feels good."

Chavez, who lost his starting job at third base when the A's acquired [Kevin Kouzmanoff](#) from the [San Diego Padres](#), also is sore from injuries but is healthy. He has been moving around the infield, playing third base and first base, and he is about to start playing shortstop, too. Chavez's bat speed has returned to what it was in the days of old, already hitting two homers and a triple in his 14 spring at-bats.

"This spring has been the most enjoyable I've ever had," says Chavez, spending his 14th year in the A's organization. "Mentally, I'm enjoying the game again."

Chavez, who will earn \$12 million in the final year of his contract, realizes this spring is different than any in his professional career.

"It's the first time ever I had to fight for a spot," says Chavez, who has had five surgeries the last two years. "I'm not using that as an excuse. If I'm going to take up a roster spot, I've got to prove that I'm healthy, and that I'm productive."

Says Sheets: "Come on, if he's healthy, he's going to be in the lineup everyday, somewhere. They built this organization around health."

There'll be a day, Chavez says, when he's simply a DH. Yet, for now, he's fine with providing support and tips to Kouzmanoff and

"Chavy has so much pride," Beane says. "He realizes just how much he likes baseball and misses it. So he's going to appreciate it there. He's very optimistic, but also realistic, just because of the magnitude of injuries he's had."

Chavez was in severe pain in 2006, but with the A's in the postseason hunt and advancing to the [American League Championship](#) body for the team, playing through back and shoulder injuries.

It was no different for Sheets. With the [Milwaukee Brewers](#) in 2007, he was the starter in the All-Star Game but had arm problem half. Yet, with his team on the way to their first playoffs in 26 years, it was no time to worry about his future.

"I wouldn't have changed a thing. Neither of us would have," says Sheets. "We were in a playoff run. It cost us, but that's always. When you're on that field, you go all out and give everything you've got."

"That's exactly what we're going to do this year."