

Meet Matt LaPorta

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
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Well, it's official. The Indians have traded C.C. Sabathia to the Milwaukee Brewers for a package of prospects. A package of prospects headlined by slugger Matt LaPorta, who is currently terrorizing AA pitching and is regarded as one of the top hitting prospects in all of baseball. We'll be running a myriad of pieces all week breaking down this deal, but for right now, Paulie C says it's time to get to know Matt LaPorta a little bit better. And that's what he does for us in his latest column.



While the particulars of the Sabathia deal remain murky beyond Matt LaPorta (reports are that there are two more minor leaguers coming with LaPorta, but nothing firm has been reported), let's just get into Matt LaPorta while we wait for more concrete details to evaluate the whole deal or handle the emotions of watching C.C. go and what the deal means in a larger sense.

LaPorta attended the University of Florida and was considered one of the top power hitters in the country entering his junior season. His junior season was marred, however, by an oblique injury that caused his draft stock to drop to the point of being a 14th round selection by the Red Sox. LaPorta decided to return for his senior year and proved to be impressive enough to become the 7th overall pick by the Brewers, netting a \$2M signing bonus. The pick was seen as odd by most as LaPorta played 1B at Florida and was thought to be a very polished hitter who could move his way up through the minor league ladder very quickly. The curiosity over the pick was not over LaPorta's talent, but rather his position as he would be blocked by Prince Fielder in Milwaukee (remember a few weeks ago when I mentioned the Indians should look for a MLB-ready stud blocked by young MLB talent?), meaning that a position change was likely in the offing.

After dominating in his first season in the minor leagues (admittedly at very low levels for his advanced age), he entered the 2008 season in Huntsville, the

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Brewers' AA affiliate. All he's done in [AA this year is hit 20 HR with 62 RBI while posting a .988 OPS against AA pitching](#)

His 20 HR in 82 games, by the way, rank 10th in all of Minor League Baseball, and he is one of only two players in the top 10 for HR under the age of 25 who has played most of their season at AA or higher (Oakland's Christopher Davis is the other)...so the power, particularly at his age, is very impressive. His bat is, without question, his greatest attribute as the position change that the Brewers instituted in an attempt to move him away from Fielder's position, moving LaPorta to the OF, has not gone very well as LaPorta is reported to be a sub-par OF with little hope that he would improve enough as an OF defensively to ever seriously have that be an option in the Majors.

Before going further with LaPorta, a factor needs to be brought up as most Indians' fans see LaPorta in AA and immediately think that he is not close to contributing at the big league level. The factor that many don't know, however, is that the Brewers have an organizational philosophy of keeping groups of players together as they progress through the minor leagues. It allowed players like Fielder, J.J. Hardy, Rickie Weeks, and other players currently in Milwaukee to grow as a unit throughout their minor league career, playing on the same teams year after year, as opposed to having them bounce around the minors, fostering chemistry and comfort among a group of players. To wit, the Brewers' Huntsville team boasts LaPorta, Mat Gamel, Alcides Escobar, Angel Salome, and Michael Brantley, all of whom are legitimate MLB prospects...and that's just the position players on what looks to be a historically good minor league team. Most, if not all, of those players have merited a promotion to AAA and LaPorta is arguably the player that would most deserve that promotion.

Now, all of that being said, LaPorta's bat is much more advanced than AA and he will likely report to Buffalo initially with the idea that he will join the Indians at some point this season and possibly before the September call-ups. The downside of LaPorta, namely his defense, does not become as much of an issue in the Indians' organization as LaPorta can go to Buffalo, then Cleveland, with the idea that he can revert back to 1B or simply DH for either team to concentrate on his greatest attribute, his bat. While the likes of Jordan Brown, Michael Aubrey, and even Ryan Garko are all decent players, none is in the class of LaPorta, who immediately becomes the best prospect in the Indians' organization and is not as far away from contributing as the fact that he's only played as high as AA this year would seem to portend.

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While projecting minor leaguers into big leaguers is really a crapshoot (for every Evan Longoria, there are 25 guys like Andy LaRoche and Andy Marte...who, by the way, is the reason that skepticism exists on LaPorta or anyone else coming to Cleveland), LaPorta looks like the real deal offensively, with a polished bat capable of more power than anyone currently in the Tribe organization.

If you wanted a young power bat for Sabathia, you got him and LaPorta is probably as advanced as you're going to find that would be available from a team in contention. The absurdity that the Brewers should have had been forced to part with players like Ryan Braun or Manny Parra for three months of C.C. (remember that Colon was under contract for all of 2003 when that deal was consummated), when 2008 is obviously the year they're going for the brass ring (Ben Sheets figures to follow C.C. out of Wisconsin at the end of the year), shows little grasp on how baseball trades work and how rent-a-players work.

Much more to come on this as the other names in the deal get fleshed out and what the deal means in the grand scheme of things, but the Indians netted what they should have for Sabathia, a stud-in-waiting close enough to being ready to Cleveland that seeing him in 2008 and having him legitimately contribute in 2009 is not out of the question.