

Harrison enjoys hot start with Kernels

Written by S.D. Buhr

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One of the top-ranked high school power hitters at the time, Travis Harrison was drafted by the Minnesota Twins with a supplemental first round pick (the 50th overall) in 2011.

He signed a \$1.05 million bonus to join the Twins organization and bypassed a scholarship offer to play baseball for USC.

There's never been much doubt about Harrison's ability to hit a baseball. The question in many minds is what his ultimate defensive position will be. Right now, the Twins are working with Harrison to develop his skills at third base for the Cedar Rapids Kernels.

Harrison is one of the top third-base prospects in the Twins minor league organization, along with super-prospect Miguel Sano, who is currently playing for high-Class A Fort Myers.

This past Friday night, Harrison gave his Kernels team a dramatic win with a 12th inning walk-off single to beat the Kane County Cougars. It was the second consecutive walk-off victory for the Kernels, coming just one night after Byron Buxton's walk-off grand slam to beat the Burlington Bees.

It was Harrison's second walk-off single recently. The first came when he hit what appeared to be a grand slam to beat the Lansing Lugnuts. However, his teammates mobbed him as he rounded second base and two of the runners head of him were ruled by the umpires to have abandoned their attempts to advance, leaving Harrison with a very long game-winning single

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rather than a home run.

On Saturday afternoon, the day after his most recent game-winning hit, Harrison sat down for an interview with Metro Sports Report.

MSR: You're still learning to play third base. You had kind of a rough start to the season with something like five errors in the first 10 games. You seem to be looking a lot more comfortable out there lately. Are you feeling better out there?

Harrison: Yeah, I've been feeling good. Jake (Manager Jake Mauer) has been helping a ton and he's also made me learn that I might have a couple of errors, but they're errors being aggressive. They (official scorers) are giving me errors on tough plays, but I want to be a big league third baseman, so that's fine.

But I'm not worried about the errors. I'm worried about making plays for the pitcher, making plays for the team. Just like any other infielder, if they give you an error and you're doing the best you can do, you can't control that.

MSR: You've made a lot of pretty nice plays out there as well. You probably feel better about those than you necessarily feel bad about the errors?

Harrison: Yeah, I mean you always want to make the routine plays first, that's your number one goal, so you focus on that. You give 100 percent effort and you're going to make highlight plays every once in awhile and those are good for the team. But first of all, you want to make the routine plays. Those are most important.

MSR: The Twins have, for years, had a little trouble finding a third baseman to stick at the big league level. Is that something that gives you some motivation? The flip side of that is there are a couple of guys in the organization above you that look like they could have the potential to stick as well.

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Do you pay attention to what everyone else in the organization at your position is doing or do you just go out and worry about playing your game?

Harrison: I just go out and play. I want to be the starting third baseman for the Twins for a long time. I mean that's the goal. I know I can do it. I just have to keep putting in the hard work and I'll get there.

Following the other people? No. I know the other guys because of spring training. I know Miguel (Sano), we worked out together. Miguel's a great player. I'm just going to work my ass off and whatever happens is going to happen.

MSR: You look around the Midwest League and you would be leading a lot of teams in a lot of offensive statistical categories. Here, you're one part, though one very important part, of an awfully good day-to-day lineup.

Harrison: It's fun to be a part of. We're all off to good starts. We're all hitting the ball pretty well and we're all pulling for each other. No one's concerned with who has the most RBIs or anything. We're all just trying to do a job.

I gotta say, though, Walker (Adam Brett Walker) is stealing a lot of my RBIs, isn't he? Every time I get up there, there's no one on base! (laughing).

It's fun. Walker's obviously off to a good start, Buck (Byron Buxton) is off to a good start. Everyone in the lineup really is. And so we're all just having fun, doing the best we can.

Stats don't really tell you anything in baseball. Nothing really.

MSR: There's a whole sabermetric community that doesn't want to hear you say that!

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Harrison: Right (laughing). It's true though, ya know. For example, they saw Niko (Goodrum) had an error last night. Niko had the best game he's had all year at shortstop last night! It's stuff like that. So, they get on you about numbers things, things like that. It's just not the story, so we don't worry about that kind of stuff.

MSR: You've had, at least that I've seen, two walk-off singles. This one was a little different than the last time.

Harrison: This one was a real single (laughing).

Yeah, those are fun. The only non-fun part about it is getting drenched with ice in the shower. Buck had to go through it the night before and they got me last night, but yeah it's exciting. Just goes back to pulling for each other. Just trying to get it done. We're not a bunch of selfish guys, we're just trying to win for the team.

MSR: You might be responsible for one lesson that the entire team has learned. After Buxton's grand slam the other night, everybody came to home plate and waited for him instead of chasing him around second base. So there's a lesson learned. I don't know if you're responsible for teaching it to them, but somebody did, right?

Harrison: (laughing) Right, that was good. With Buck's, we were down by three so they didn't have a choice.

MSR: You're not going to tell me those guys ran around chasing you because they knew it didn't matter if your run counted or not. You don't really believe anybody was thinking like that.

Harrison: No, we were all just super excited. They weren't trying to steal anything away from me. I was excited, I was jumping up and down. It didn't matter. When they told me it was a single after the game, I wasn't really worried about it.

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MSR: Tell me a little about yourself in high school. Were you a multi-sport guy or did you pretty much stick to baseball?

Harrison: No, I stuck to baseball. I played with APD Academy all through high school. It's a big baseball academy out in southern California. I started at a really young age and I stuck with that.

I played basketball in middle school. Never played football, even though I went to a big football school. I stayed away from that. It was all baseball. I tried to focus on that. I've always played golf. Golf's fun. I enjoy that.

MSR: That was going to be the next question. Away from the ballpark, what sort of things do you enjoy doing?

Harrison: I love playing golf. I'm a big golfer. I love playing the guitar. I like things that kind of take me away from playing baseball and things that I can just relax and just focus on that.

I'm not a big video game guy. I've always gotta do something. So when I'm out on the golf course, I feel like I'm not even thinking about baseball. I'm just away from it. Like, sometimes if I'm going through a slump, I go out and play a round of golf in the morning just to reset.

MSR: The coaches don't mind that? This is old school, but there was a time when coaches discouraged players from golfing because they didn't want it screwing up the player's swing.

Harrison: Everyone tells me that. I think of it as two totally different sports. I've been swinging a baseball bat since I was three or four years old, so I'm not going to forget how to do that. I don't even think about that. They're both hand-eye coordination.

I think if it gets in your head, that's when you might get screwed up. Once you get to know the golf swing, there's actually a lot of similar things that go on between a golf swing and a baseball

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swing. Obviously, the ball's down but it's never really bothered me, it's always relaxed me and it's got me focused again.

MSR: I read somewhere that the Twins wanted you to show more power this year, rather than spraying the ball to all fields. That seems contrary to the Twins' past hitting philosophy, in my mind. Is that what they wanted to see you do more of this year?

Harrison: I think so. I mean they want me to hit the ball hard and hit the ball out of the park and hit doubles and that kind of thing. I don't go up there thinking, "try to hit a home run." I think, "try to hit a hard line drive."

I know home runs are going to come. Home runs are about selecting a pitch you can drive out of the yard instead of taking one you can hit to right field for a single. And I'm learning that, slowly. I've hit some home runs this year and I've hit a lot of doubles and so that's going well.

MSR: I think you've got the same number of home runs this year that you had all of last year.

Harrison: Yeah, I should have more! (laughing)

MSR: At least one!

Harrison: (smiling) So yeah, it's going good.