

Kellen Sweeney on the mend in Florida

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kellen Sweeney went to a mall in Dunedin, Fla., on Saturday to kill a little time.

That's how it is for ballplayers on the disabled list. Time goes slowly when you're hurt.

Sweeney, 19, fractured a small bone at the base of his left thumb in late June while playing for the Bluefield (W.Va.) Blue Jays in the Appalachian League and has not played since June 30. The injury is near his left wrist.

He got caught in a rundown and fell. "When I fell back, I guess I tried to break my fall with my wrist and that's what happened," said Sweeney, who played high school ball at Cedar Rapids Jefferson.

The initial X-rays, taken in Bluefield, did not reveal the fracture, but they knew he was hurt. They eventually sent him to the Toronto Blue Jays' training facility in Dunedin, where an X-ray revealed the fracture and the extent of the injury.

It took a while to figure it out. "Probably at least two weeks," he said. "For two weeks I didn't know exactly what it was."

Sweeney missed all of July and now has missed the first week of August. He played in only nine games at Bluefield in the Short Season Class A league and has little to show for it.

He went 4-for-35 for a .114 batting average, then got hurt. "I started off slow, but I was starting to make good contact with the ball when I got hurt," he said.

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Toronto picked Sweeney in the second round of the 2010 draft and moved him from shortstop to third base. He said he likes his new position and is eager to play regularly again.

He hit .267 in 16 games in the Rookie Gulf Coast League at the tail end of the 2010 campaign after signing. All told, he's hitting .200 (16 for 80) as a professional baseball player in 25 games.

"It's frustrating at times, just because I'm not able to play," he said. "I know it's a wrist injury and I can't try to get back too quick, because I don't want to mess it up for next year because the wrists are a big part of baseball."

Sweeney is working out in Dunedin, taking ground balls and throwing. He assumes he'll return to Bluefield when he's ready, rather than playing in Dunedin in the Gulf Coast League again. He said there's no timetable for his return.

"When I make contact with the ball it hurts a little bit, but other than that I'm getting back into it," he said.

Sweeney had Tommy John surgery in 2009 to repair a torn ligament in his right elbow, but healed quickly and was ready for the start of the 2010 high school season at Cedar Rapids Jefferson.

This makes two serious injuries in three years. Most ballplayers get hurt at some point in their careers, and Sweeney is hoping he doesn't have any more setbacks.

"Yeah, that's what I'm hoping," he said.