

Buxton draws comparison to Trout

Written by Mike Koolbeck

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When Byron Buxton was asked to compare his style of play to a current major leaguer, he immediately mentioned Atlanta Braves outfielder B.J. Upton.

Buxton's Cedar Rapids Kernels batting coach Tommy Watkins looked a little closer to home.

"Seeing Mike Trout a couple of years ago, (Buxton) reminds me of a Mike Trout type player," said Watkins, who was a coach at Beloit when Trout, last year's American League Rookie of the Year and runnerup in Most Valuable Player voting, patrolled center field for the Kernels in 2010.

Watkins said Buxton does many of the same things Trout did.

"He can change things offensively, defensively, on the bases, throwing guys out, running down balls in the gap. He has it all," Watkins said of Buxton, a 19-year-old center fielder who was the No.2 player overall taken in last June's draft by the Minnesota Twins out of high school in Baxley, Ga.

Buxton and the Kernels open up the Midwest League season Thursday night against Beloit at Veterans Memorial Stadium. First pitch is 6:35. Fans can get a sneak peek of the team at "Meet the Players" night Wednesday at the stadium. Festivities start at 5 p.m.

Because of his high draft status and the reported \$6 million signing bonus he received from the Twins, expectations are high for Buxton. He has not disappointed thus far in his brief career. He was named the top prospect in both the Gulf Coast and Appalachian Leagues last summer by Baseball America.

"He can pretty much do what he wants to do," Kernels Manager Jake Mauer said of Buxton's ability. "He is a five-tool type guy."

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The soft-spoken Buxton was not lacking in confidence when he ticked off the reasons he compared himself to Upton.

"I throw the ball from the outfield real well. I can hit, run. I can do it all," he said.

It's not bragging if you can do it and Buxton, if anything, comes off as a humble kid looking forward to his first full season of professional baseball.

"He's a young man that handles himself the right way. A hard worker," Mauer said. "Obviously, where he was drafted, there are expectations that come with it. What he needs to do is just be the best player that he can be and just play baseball."

Buxton, who will leadoff and play center field for the Kernels, acknowledged those expectations, but said he has a plan to cope.

"I relax and don't change my game," he said. "I just go out and see what I can do to accomplish my expectations.

"I'm hoping to accomplish quite a few things. Obviously, to move up in the farm system. But I just want to go out and have fun and do my best and let my performance speak for me."

Buxton had signed a letter of intent to play football and baseball at the University of Georgia before he was drafted by the Twins. He said he knew following his sophomore year in high school that he probably would have a baseball career.

"I did a few workouts and that's when I got on the radar," he said.

While it took big league teams until then to figure out Buxton was an up-and-comer, his father

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saw something in his son much earlier, inserting his son into a slo-pitch softball game in the outfield when the lad was but 5.

"I got hit in the head with a fly ball," Buxton said of that experience. "I missed it."

But the can't miss kid is already on the fast track to the majors. He got a chance to play with the Twins for one game in spring training. He singled off A.J. Burnett and stole second.

"It felt good. It felt real good," Buxton admitted.

Before too long, Buxton could be patrolling center field at Target Field. Trout was in Cedar Rapids for half a season and year later was in the big leagues with the Angels.

"He's going to be fun to watch no matter where he is playing," Watkins said. "Whether it's in the Gulf Coast League in Florida, here in Cedar Rapids or in Rochester -- or Minnesota. Wherever he's doing it, he's going to be fun to watch."

While Buxton said his goal is to move up, he also said he has no timetable to make it to the big leagues.

"I'm only 19," he said. "I just got to go out and perform first and see what I can do on the field."

Mauer praised Buxton's personality and work ethic.

"He's a very good person, a very hard worker," Mauer said. "You put that with his talent and the sky's the limit."