

Buxton-Correa matchup on hold

Written by S.D. Buhr
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Wednesday, May 8, was supposed to be a big night for fans that follow the top minor league prospects in professional baseball.

Quad Cities shortstop Carlos Correa, selected with the No. 1 pick overall by the Houston Astros in last June's amateur draft, was set to go head-to-head against Kernels center fielder Byron Buxton, chosen as the No. 2 pick overall in the same draft by the Minnesota Twins.

According to MiLB.com, it was the first time two position players of high school age were drafted in the first two spots in more than 20 years. As a result, it is almost inevitable that Correa and Buxton will be compared closely to one another throughout their careers.

But thanks to a pitch that hit Correa in the hand a week ago and put him on the disabled list, their first matchup on the same field will have to wait. The question is, for how long?

Correa was placed on the Bandits' seven-day disabled list on May 3, which would make him eligible to be reactivated for Friday's series finale with the Kernels. However, there's been no indication from the team that they intend to do so.

After this series, the Kernels and River Bandits are scheduled to face one another next on June 5 in Cedar Rapids. Then again, if Buxton continues to perform at current levels, there is legitimate reason to question whether he will still be wearing a Kernels uniform at that point.

If Correa and Buxton don't face one another this season, it's unlikely they'll match up again in a regular season game until they wear big league uniforms for the Astros and Twins. The two organizations have no high-A, AA or AAA affiliates playing in the same league.

How rare would an early meeting of Nos. 1 and 2 picks from the same draft be? Only three times have the top two picks in the draft made their full-season debuts in the same league in the same season. It hasn't happened in the Midwest League since the No. 1 pick in the 1983 draft, Tim Belcher, opened the following season with the Madison Muskies and No. 2 pick Kurt

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Stillwell was in a Cedar Rapids Reds uniform.

It's not difficult to understand, then, why many fans have looked forward to seeing Correa and Buxton on the same field this season.

Though we may not see Buxton and Correa share a ball field this week, we can take a look at how their first years of full-season professional baseball have compared so far.

There's no doubt that Buxton is off to the better start. While there is already considerable speculation concerning how soon the Kernels' center fielder might be promoted to the next level in the Twins' minor league organization, there has been little, if any, such speculation where Correa is concerned.

Five weeks into the season, Buxton has played in all but one of the Kernels' 29 games and has the second highest batting average in the Midwest League at .373. Correa was having some trouble staying on the field for the River Bandits even before his current stint on the disabled list. He has already missed 11 of Quad Cities' 29 games and is hitting just .221.

Buxton leads the MWL with a .488 on-base percentage and also leads the league with a .647 slugging percentage. Combined, that puts his OPS (on-base plus slugging) at a league-high 1.135. Of Buxton's 38 hits, 15 (or almost 40 per cent) have been for extra bases. He has seven doubles, three triples and five home runs. Buxton has walked more times (24) than he has struck out (21) and has stolen 13 bases in 17 attempts.

Correa has reached base at a .384 clip and is slugging just .397, for a .781 OPS. He has three doubles and three home runs. Correa has drawn just 15 walks while striking out 23 times. He has one stolen base and has been caught stealing once.

Five very early weeks in the first full season of the professional careers of these two prospects mean very little in terms of predicting their ultimate success or failure as Major League ballplayers. If both men stay with their current organizations long term, fans should eventually have plenty of opportunities for side by side comparisons at the Major League level, now that

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Correa's Astros are in the American League.

Regardless of whether Correa is activated in time to face Buxton and theernels this week, fans in Cedar Rapids should get their first opportunity to see the No. 1 pick in last year's draft on June 5.