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CUBS HERO

"I've seen that swing 10,000 times," he said. "I started screaming. My wife would not get off the couch until she actually saw it land. She said, 'He's catching it.' I said, 'No way!'"

"My wife went to her knees. We began to lose feeling."

As the ball sailed 416 feet, almost to the back of the left-field bleachers, Cubs play-by-play man Len Kasper hollered: "Davis in the air ... deep left ... it is GONE! That's a grand slam to tie the game. Whoa, baby!"

Davis celebrated with two-handed high-fives from Javier Baez, David Bote and Schwarber. Heyward tapped him on the helmet.

As Davis returned to the dugout, analyst Jim Deshaies asked wryly: "How many casual Cubs fans are going: Who's Taylor Davis? Where'd we get him?"

THE CARDINALS WAY?

Ben Zobrist knows what it's like to be an unlikely major-leaguer. Undrafted, he nearly quit the game to attend Calvary Bible College.

"I talked to Taylor a few years ago during his first big-league camp," the former Lexington Legends star said. "I heard it and was like: This is a pretty incredible story."

His interviewer gave him a blank stare.

"You don't know the story?" Zobrist responded.

It starts with a father who worshipped Pete Rose and the Big Red Machine while growing up in Cincinnati, a self-described "baseball freak" who told his son that one of the great things about the game is "you don't have to be 6-5. You can be whatever size you want."

The son could not get enough. On doubleheader days, he begged to catch both games. Julia believed that was too much, setting up a tug-of-war.

"It was an argument in our house," said Matt, who coached his son until age 12. "I either got it from Julia or Taylor."

Taylor hit nearly .500 as a high school senior, but five of his teammates got drafted higher. The Marlins offered no bonus, and their sales pitch went like this: Hey, we're close enough so you can come to Instructional League and still sleep in

your own bed.

In another gut punch, only one four-year school offered scholarship money: Morehead State. So that's where he went.

Davis tore it up as a junior in 2011, hitting .414 with 17 homers on a team that went 10-39. A Cardinals scout told Matt: "We really like your kid. What will it take to sign him?"

Matt replied: "Market price. If you're fair, we're signing."

The scout told him to expect to be drafted in the 14th round. Done deal, he added.

The Davises held a family party that turned into "a nightmare," Matt said. "We watched our son sit by the computer for three days."

They never heard from the Cardinals. Taylor was so distraught, Matt worried he would quit. Instead he went to the Cape Cod League with these instructions from his father: "Go up there and shove it up their (butt)."

And he did. Davis hit .375 with nine walks in 21 games.

Julia and Matt visited in July, and during batting practice, Matt noticed an older gentleman in a floppy hat. He figured the man was a spectator. Day after day he came to observe.

"Are you Taylor's dad?" the man finally asked. "I like the way he's catching."

The man was Tim Wilken, then the Cubs' director of amateur and professional scouting. The Davis family agreed to meet him the next day for breakfast. There he began to extoll the virtues of the Cubs organization and new chairman Tom Ricketts.

"He slid a contract across, and we about fell out of our chairs," Matt said.

Taylor told Wilken: "I'm scheduled to catch tonight. I'd really like to."

"You can catch tonight," Wilken replied, "but I'll need that contract back."

Taylor and his dad broke out laughing. His professional career was about to begin.

SPEECHLESS

Looking for symbolism? Before Sunday night's game against the Cardinals, Davis was drinking a cup of coffee. Iced coffee, to be specific.

Davis' time with the Cubs will expire once No. 2 catcher Victor Caratini recovers from a broken bone in his left hand. Caratini already is taking batting practice and could return in less than two weeks.

Davis caught only one pitch Sunday, and it was ceremonial, delivered by Army 1st Sgt. Christopher Grez.

Yet no matter what happens from here, Davis hit a grand slam at Wrigley Field against the team he has every right to despise to help the Cubs win a key game. His manager respects him and his teammates love him.

"The defensive side will keep him in the game for a while," Joe Maddon said. "He has great hands, reminds me of (former major-league catcher Jose Molina). You talk to the analytical dudes, they just go nuts over the way he receives a baseball. He's a good game caller, does great prep, is always studying and there to help everyone else."

Cubs reliever Steve Cishek texted Davis on Saturday night to say how happy he was for him.

"I told him I've probably watched the video on Instagram 100 times," Cishek said. "He crushed that thing. In fact when he hit it, he did a subtle bat flip. I don't know if anyone saw that."

Davis' look is everyman. Or, more accurate, everyfan.

"The fact that I'm built like I am is fun," he said. "Either I'm laughing, the fans are laughing or the other team is laughing. Somebody is smiling and having a good time. That's the goal for me."

Davis' goofy side was revealed in a 2017 video the Triple-A Iowa Cubs produced. Set to "Can't Take My Eyes Off You," Davis is shown repeatedly gazing into the camera, a staring contest he cannot win.

"I got significantly more publicity for that," he said, "than when I got called up."

The attention he received for the grand slam blew him away. Former coaches and teammates buzzed his phone all night and into Sunday, calling and texting the "Crash" Davis they adore.

There was one man who didn't call, though, at least not initially. He's the one who witnessed those 10,000 swings.

Matt Davis texted his son to explain his quandary: I'm speechless.

CITATION (TURABIAN STYLE)

Lexington Herald-Leader (KY) (Lexington, Kentucky), May 8, 2019: 15. NewsBank: America's News. [https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?](https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=NewsBank&docref=image/v2:1652098DD7407BF0@NewsBank-1734A563837171BE@2458612-1734A5C30F3C341A@14)

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