

Kellen Sweeney got tips from Carew

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kellen Sweeney does not feel like a .198 hitter in the low minors, but that's where he stands after four years with the Toronto Blue Jays.

He hopes some batting tips from Hall of Famer Rod Carew will help jump-start his career.

Ryan Sweeney, Kellen's older brother who plays for the Chicago Cubs, took lessons from Carew last winter and it helped his power numbers during the 2013 campaign. Kellen followed Ryan's advice and spent several days with Carew in California this winter.

"It was good," he said. "He taught me a lot of stuff. He kind of focuses on you individually.

"He gives you different tips. He doesn't give it all in one day, so that's good. He gives you little things that feel right to you after awhile."

Carew collected more than 3,000 hits in his Major League career and was considered a craftsman with the bat. "He knows baseball," said Sweeney.

Sweeney, 22, graduated from Cedar Rapids Jefferson in 2010. He was selected in the second of the draft that year by the Toronto Blue Jays and received a \$600,000 signing bonus.

He got off to a decent start in pro baseball that summer when he hit .267 in 16 games in the Gulf Coast League, but he's struggled ever since.

Sweeney hit .111 in nine games during an injury-riddled campaign in 2011 in the Appalachian

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League, then hit .179 in 110 games in the Midwest League and the Northwest League in 2012.

Sweeney batted .185 with five home runs and 32 RBIs in 109 games during his second stop in Lansing (Mich.) in the Midwest League last year.

All told, he's appeared in 244 games in the minors and has produced 162 hits, 31 doubles, nine triples, 11 home runs and 81 RBIs, with 122 walks and 200 strikeouts.

Sweeney has played all four infield positions in the minor leagues. He'll leave for spring training in Florida March 1 and said he has no idea what positions he'll play this season and where he'll be assigned.

"They don't tell you anything until the end of spring training," he said. "I honestly have no idea. I kind of just go with the flow."

Sweeney said he feels good and is anxious to get his career moving in the right direction. "Just go in and show them what I really can do in spring training," he said.