

Gordon has baseball in his blood

Written by Jim Ecker

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Cedar Rapids Kernels shortstop Nick Gordon was not born at a Major League ballpark, but he's certainly spent a good portion of his life in them.

His father is Tom "Flash" Gordon, who enjoyed a long career as a pitcher in the big leagues from 1988 through 2009. His older brother is Dee Gordon, an all-star second baseman with the Los Angeles Dodgers last year and now a member of the Miami Marlins.

Nick Gordon, 19, has baseball in his blood.

"My dad never pushed baseball on us, but being around it, we ended up loving the game so much," Gordon said Monday after arriving in Cedar Rapids. "It was always something me and my brother wanted to do.

"Baseball was a big thing in our family," he acknowledged. "Being around the park every day, you couldn't ask for anything better than that. We gradually fell in love with the game. It's always been a big part of us."

The Minnesota Twins selected Gordon in the first round of the 2014 draft with the No. 5 overall pick and gave him \$3,851,000 to sign on the dotted line. He hit .294 in 57 games with Elizabethton in the Appalachian League last summer and was promoted to Cedar Rapids and the Midwest League for the 2015 campaign.

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Dee Gordon played in the Midwest League in 2009 and has told his little brother a little about playing in the league. "He told me it was cold," laughed Gordon, whose family is from Florida.

Gordon will wear uniform No. 5, the same number he's had since high school, and he'll bat second in the lineup for Cedar Rapids. The Kernels open the season Thursday night with a three-game series at Kane County, then will face Beloit in the home opener Sunday at 4 p.m.

Kernels Manager Jake Mauer likes what he's seen of Gordon so far.

"You can tell he's grown up around a ballpark," Mauer said Monday, back in his office at Veterans Memorial Stadium for the third year. "He's got a pretty good feel how to play the game.

"He knows where the barrel is and has pretty quick hands, especially for a young man 19 years old."

Gordon, who bats left-handed, will get a chance to showcase his skills during a 140-game season in the Class A Midwest League. The Kernels have featured good shortstops in recent years and Mauer is confident Gordon will keep the streak going.

"This will be the most baseball he's ever played in his life," the skipper said. "We'll get him going and see how it shakes out.

"He's from a great family," Mauer said. "We got a chance to meet the family down in Fort Myers and we'll see them a lot up here in Cedar Rapids. He's got a good family in terms of his background and support system."

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Tom "Flash" Gordon pitched for seven teams in the Major Leagues with Kansas City, Boston, Chicago Cubs, Chicago White Sox, Yankees, Phillies and Diamondbacks. He compiled a 138-126 record as a starter and successful relief pitcher, made the All-Star team three times and helped the Phils win the World Series in 2008.

Dee Gordon, 25, made the National League all-star team last year with the Dodgers. He led the Major Leagues with 64 stolen bases and 12 triples in 2014, then was included in a big trade with the Marlins and signed for \$2.5 million this year.

Gordon hopes to follow his brother and make the Major Leagues at some point. The next step is having a successful season in Cedar Rapids.

"It feels good to be out of Florida for a little bit and get up to Iowa and play," he remarked. "I'm kind of excited about it. Better competition, better ballparks, stuff like that. Just moving up is a good thing.

"It's good to come up here and experience different weather. It's pretty cool. I'm looking forward to it."

Nick Gordon is six years younger than his older brother, so he still has some catching up to do as a ballplayer.

"I'm still trying to do that," he said, smiling. "No matter how big and strong I get, he's always my older brother, he always knows my weaknesses.

"I look up to him," Gordon said. "He's been great. You couldn't ask for a better older brother."

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Gordon said he loved hanging around Major League ballparks with his father. He was eight and nine years old when "Flash" Gordon played for the Yankees. That's when Nick got to know his favorite ballplayer on the field and in the clubhouse.

"Derek Jeter," he said. "He was always my idol. I'm pretty sure he's everybody's idol. But Derek Jeter, definitely. He's the captain."

Gordon soaked it all in, every chance he got to spend time in a major league park.

"Just meeting all the great players," he mused. "You see those guys are just like us. They're cool guys and stuff like that."

"It was pretty cool for my family to be able to experience that."