

Twins like Chad Christensen's versatility

Written by Jim Ecker
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The Minnesota Twins did not draft Chad Christensen so he could play in his home town for the Cedar Rapidsernels some day, although that would be an added bonus.

Rather, the Twins took Christensen in the 25th round of the 2013 draft because they like his versatility and talent.

Christensen is hitting .290 with six RBIs in nine games for Minnesota's team in the Florida Gulf Coast League, which means he's probably two steps away from playing for the Kernels. Most Twins prospects start in the Gulf Coast League and then play for Elizabethton (Tenn.) in the Appalachian League before coming to Cedar Rapids.

Having a home-town guy on the Cedar Rapids roster could be good for business, but Twins farm director Brad Steil said it had absolutely nothing to do with Minnesota grabbing Christensen in the draft last month.

"That was not a factor in our selecting him," Steil said matter-of-factly on his most recent visit to Cedar Rapids.

Christensen, a 2009 graduate of Cedar Rapids Washington, was an all-Big Ten shortstop at Nebraska in 2012 and an all-Big Ten outfielder for the Cornhuskers this year. He led the Big Ten in hitting in league games with a .431 average this season and batted .364 overall with two homers and 39 RBIs.

He's already played the outfield, third base and first base in the Gulf Coast League, demonstrating his ability to help a ballclub in a variety of ways.

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"He's a guy that can play all over the field," said Steil. "He had experience doing that in college and had a lot of success at Nebraska. He's a guy that can fit in anywhere you put him.

"Those kind of guys are valuable," said Steil. "Your lineup changes from day to day, especially at the lower levels in the minor leagues. That kind of versatility is something you need in an organization. It's a good skill to have."

Most players take one step at a time in the minor leagues. If Christensen continues to do well, his normal path would take him to Elizabethton in 2014 and to Cedar Rapids in 2015, but he's a college graduate and could move more quickly than other players. On the other hand, he'll have to prove he deserves to be promoted.

Steil declined to put a timetable on Christensen.

"It's probably too soon," he said. "Both of those rosters (in the GCL and Appalachian League) are pretty full, so we'll just have to see how the season plays out. I don't think we'd have any concerns with him going to Elizabethton if we needed him to do that at some point."

The Twins like more than Christensen's ability to play multiple positions.

"We know that he's a competitor and he plays hard," said Steil. "He's a hard worker and all those kind of things you look for in players that you're bringing into the organization."