

Twins Tribune

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Go Twins Go Gomez

Walleye tacos anyone?



Santana sports new jersey.
photo from flickr.com

Santana trade: a closer look

By La Velle E. Neal III
Johan Santana ... two-time Cy Young Award winner ... baseball's best pitcher and only 28 years old ... traded for four prospects?

The reality of this week's trade of Santana to the Mets has led to national media ridicule of the Twins - one East Coast writer called the team incompetent - and outrage from sports fans in the Upper Midwest. Should the Twins be blamed for being too patient? Or was it unrealistic to expect a blockbuster deal because of the accompanying factors that included Santana's desire for a trade, his complete no-trade clause and the magnitude of his contract?

The Star Tribune spoke with numerous baseball sources - front-office personnel, scouts and agents - who painted a portrait of a complex and everchanging trading landscape that challenged first-year Twins General Manager Bill Smith's expertise. Most

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An artwork design of new Twins stadium.

photo from Flickr.com

Unusual food at new stadium leaves for an unusual "fan experience"

By Amanda Daniels
Walleye tacos, fried cheddar cheese curds and special-recipe bratwurst could be on the menu when the Minnesota Twins open their new ballpark in 2010.

The team and its new food vendor said Tuesday that distinctive local offerings would be available along with more traditional fare like hot dogs, burgers and pizza.

The Twins announced

an eight-year partnership with Buffalo, N.Y.-based Delaware North Companies Sportservice, which handles food, beverage and retail management at more than 50 sports facilities across the country.

"We want the fan experience to be unlike anything that exists today," said Rick Abramson, the company's president. The company will work with the Twins in the coming months to visit local restaurants,

survey fans and run taste tests before working up a menu and introducing a signature item.

Examples of signature items at other ballparks include fish tacos in San Diego's PETCO Park and bratwurst with "Secret Stadium Sauce" at Miller Park in Milwaukee, Abramson said. At some facilities, the company offers special chef stations where fans can see what's cooking.

By Dave Cambell
Growing pains were going to be part of the package this year with Carlos Gomez.

Two-strike drag bunts that dribble into foul territory for outs. Over-eager swings at pitches out of the strike zone. Throws that sail over the cutoff man's head.

Three weeks into his first season as Minnesota's leadoff man and everyday center fielder, though, Gomez has given the Twins enough energy and enthusiasm to live with his mistakes. The good has outweighed the bad, and with just 207 major league at-bats the Twins believe he'll get much better.

"He's ahead on the exciting part," manager Ron Gardenhire said.

Sunday was a perfect example. Gomez went Gomez to page 2



Gomez makes a diving catch
photo from

Go Gomez Young player ends up being what the Twins needed

0-for-5 to drop his average to .244, but he saved the game in the ninth inning against Cleveland, stretching full out to make a diving grab of a slicing blooper in shallow right-center.

Teammates, unprompted, claimed the catch reminded them of Torii Hunter.

"You look out there and you're like, 'Man, that ball's going to fall,'" first baseman Justin Morneau said. "All of a sudden, he just came out of nowhere and he hung onto it. It was huge."

This is exactly what Minnesota needed from the only one of four prospects acquired from the Mets in the Johan Santana trade who made the roster for opening day, especially considering the hole left in center and the heart of the order by the departure of Hunter and his seven Gold Glove awards.

The 22-year-old Gomez, who appeared in 58 games last year for New York, doesn't have Hunter's power, but he has brought an elite level of a unique skill to the top of the Twins lineup.

Speed, and plenty of it.

"He gets your attention," Indians manager Eric Wedge said.

With nine stolen bases in 10 attempts to lead the American League, the 6-foot-4, 195-pound Gomez has the kind of running ability to distract a pitcher into throwing over to first five straight times to keep his lead from getting too big. He is also fast enough to be a legitimate threat to score soon after leaving the batter's box.

Just ask him.

"When I'm on base, it's like I got one run already," Gomez said. "I can steal second, and then the other team's got problems. I'm on second and it's a groundball, I'll be at home."

Raised in the Dominican Republic, Gomez might sound cockier than he really due to the difficulty of internal Spanish-to-English translation.

He is quite confident, though, and will quickly _ there's that fast part again _ reject any hint of his game as being one- or two-dimensional despite his pride in his speed.

Because along with his feet and glove, he's got a bat.

"In September, when the season's over, you see the numbers and we've got a good year," he said.

As a contrast to his bravado, Gomez has spoken a constant appreciation for his coaches, teammates and place on the lineup card.

"I'm so happy for this opportunity," he said.

He has also frequently expressed a willingness to learn, which is the most important piece for the Twins. There is, of course, plenty for them to teach.

Gardenhire is trying to get him to stop faking a bunt on the first pitch he sees, then pulling the bat back and swinging away.

First-base coach Jerry White, who works with the outfielders, is encouraging Gomez to aim his throws toward third, an overcorrection that could put the ball back on line toward the plate.

"In time he's going to be a real good player," White said.

Hitting coach Joe Vavra has been telling him to

swing hard, but not so much that he falls down like he did a couple of water, but we're kind of doing it a drip at a time." Young players that don't



Gomez makes a good start at bat for the Twins

photo from AP

times during spring training. In 82 at-bats, Gomez has already struck out 20 times.

"I'd be the last person on earth that wants to take away his aggressiveness, but we want to make sure he stays under control of the strike zone," Vavra said. "We're filling up a glass of

listen have a hard time staying in the manager's favor, but that hasn't been the case here.

"He's still going to swing at a curveball and try to hit it through the flag and stuff like that," Gardenhire said, motioning to the roof high above left field, "but he's getting it. We're having fun with him."

Drivers beware: traffic may stall in ballpark area

By Paul Walsh

Drivers coming and going on the west side of downtown Minneapolis during the next few days will find some of their usual routes closed or slowed.

Today, westbound Interstate Hwy. 394 at Washington and 4th Avenues out of downtown Minneapolis will be closed from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m. as construction crews set beams for pedestrian bridges leading to the new Minnesota Twins stadium.

And in connection with the Northstar rail construction work in the same area, here are a few more annoyances to watch for:

- From 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. today, the 4th Street and Washington Avenue exits on eastbound I-394 will be closed.

- On Monday, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., westbound I-394 traffic entering from 3rd Street and Washington Avenue may be stopped for several 10- to 15-minute intervals while crews set girders.

For more information, visit www.mn-GetOnBoard.com or www.ballparkauthority.com.



Twins stadium under construction as viewer watch closely.

photo from flickr.com

Santana's new contract with the Mets

Details of Johan Santana's new \$137.5 million, six-year contract with the Mets, a deal that includes an option for 2014. If his option is picked up, the total value of the contract will be \$157 million over seven years:

2008: \$19 million

2009: \$20 million

2010: \$21 million

2011: \$22.5 million

2012: \$24 million

2013: \$25.5 million

Santana

of those interviewed requested anonymity because they were not authorized by their teams to comment publicly.

Johan had incredible leverage as it related to the no-trade clause," Twins President Dave St. Peter said. "He earned that no-trade, but as far as the Twins, that certainly narrows the ability to speak to some teams that expressed interest that Johan ruled out.

"Secondly, I'd say the reality everybody knew that Johan and his representatives were positioned to command a record-breaking contract. That absolutely had a tremendous impact as to what was available to the Twins in these discussions."

The Twins shot for the stars early on in negotiations, hoping top prospects such as Jon Lester and Jacoby Ellsbury could be packaged by Boston; that prized pitching prospects Philip Hughes and Ian Kennedy, plus starting center fielder Melky Cabrera, would anchor a dazzling four-player package from the Yankees; and that the Mets would include electrifying short-stop Jose Reyes.

The best-case scenario

for the Twins was a bidding war in which at least one of the teams would meet the Twins' asking price. But the bidding war never materialized.

The Mets made it clear they would not part with Reyes before the December winter meetings and never budged from that position. Yankees officials debated internally whether to pursue a deal, and ultimately decided to hang on to young pitching prospects Hughes and Kennedy. The Red Sox, baseball's 2007 champions, were wary of depleting their farm system when they already have the best team in baseball.

The Twins started the winter meetings asking the Yankees for Hughes, one of baseball's elite starting prospects, Kennedy, Cabrera and pitcher Jeff Marquez. The Yankees said no, offering Hughes, Cabrera, Marquez and a



Santana's new roster picture.
photo from mets.com

fourth player.

"We need to get this done. If we don't, I certainly won't be upset about keeping Hughes and Cabrera," he told the New York Times on Dec. 2. "I definitely won't. I don't think Minnesota wants to be stuck negotiating with just one team."

The Twins backed off of Kennedy and asked for infielder Mitchell Hilligoss instead. One problem: By the time the Twins countered, the Yankees had a Dec. 3 commitment that veteran free-agent lefthander Andy Pettitte would return.

Rumors about a potential trade with the Red Sox at the winter meetings started flying when Boston provided the Twins with medical reports of potential trade candidates. It's a common practice that frequently happens when a deal is near completion.

There were two trades under discussion with the Red Sox. One consisted of lefthander Lester, outfielder Coco Crisp and righthander Justin Masterson. The other consisted of Ellsbury, infielder Jed Lowrie, Masterson and a fourth player. The Twins wanted that fourth player to be a top prospect, but the Red Sox balked.

Some things to think about....

- The Mets ripped up Santana's original contract, in which he was due \$13.25 million this season.
- His 2014 option is a vesting option that can be triggered with innings pitched or a high finish in the Cy Young voting.
- Santana also received a full no-trade clause.
- The average annual value of Santana's salary over the next six seasons is \$22 million. Only Alex Rodriguez (\$27.5 million) will make more.



Santana in his new jersey with his new manager.
photo from Mets homepage

Red Sox officials talked excitedly among themselves at the winter meetings about landing Santana. During one meeting in the team's suite, a Red Sox official took out a silver marker and wrote "Santana = Dynasty" on an apple and placed it on a table for his counterparts to see.

Boston genuinely wanted Santana - but didn't need him. The defending World Series champions, after all, already boasted a strong rotation featuring Josh Beckett, Daisuke Matsuzaka, Curt Schilling and promising youngsters such as Lester and Clay Buchholz.

The Yankees showed

uncharacteristic restraint. "They told us several times during discussions that they wanted to be like the Twins and hold on to their own players," St. Peter said.

For two stunning months, the bitter AL East rivals tabled their historical game of one-upmanship.

By the end of December, the Twins adjusted their demands. They became open to the notion of a deal with the Mets without getting Reyes in return.

The Twins continued to say that they were willing to bring Santana to spring training and even start the season with him. manager Ron Gardenhire went to team officials in January.

Player Profile:

Joe Mauer

Full Name:

Joseph Patrick Mauer

Birth Date

April 19, 1983

Birth Place

St. Paul, MN

Age

25

Weight

230 lbs.

Height

6-5

Bats

Left

Throws

Right

Experience

4 years

Salary

2008: \$6,250,000

Position

Catcher



Mauer in front of Twins wall

Photo from ESPN.com

Biography

Joe Mauer was considered one of the best, if not the best, hitters in high school baseball. He batted .605 during his senior season and was only struck out once during his entire high school career. As a result of his outstanding play in Minnesota, he was selected to play on the Team USA Junior National team. He played with them from 1998 to 2000 and hit an astonishing .522 during his last year with the team. In 2000, he was voted the best hitter at the world tournament in Panama. The following year, in 2001, he was voted Minnesota District V Player of the Year in baseball. During Joe Mauer's two

seasons as the starting quarterback for his high school, he passed for 5,528 yards and 73 touchdowns. He also led the team to the 5A State Championship Game both years he was quarterback, winning once. For his talent as a quarterback, he was named Parade and USA Today Player of the Year, Gatorade National Player of the Year, and a Reebok/ESPN High School All-American. His outstanding accomplish in football got him a scholarship to Florida State University, but he decline the invitation in order to enter the Major League Baseball Draft. Joe Mauer made his Major League Baseball debut on April 5, 2004 for the Minnesota Twins.

2008 STATS

BA .323	HB 0	RBI 12	OBP .389	SLG .417
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Unfortunately, a knee injury three days later knocked him out of the line-up for over a month. After returning from the knee injury, he soon ran into more knee problems which sat him out for the rest of the 2004 season. In 2005, he had a total of 144

hits in 131 games behind the plate. During the 2006 season, Joe Mauer had become one of the most watched players as he has led the Major Leagues in batting average for the beginning of the season. During the month of June, he had a

batting average of .452 which earned him the American League's Player of the Month honors. In July, Joe Mauer took part in his first ever All-Star Game.

Article from Associated Content.