

BUCKEYES IN THE PROS

Heavy-Hitting Swisher Lighter In The Wallet

By MIKE WACHSMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since making his debut in the major leagues Sept. 3 as a member of the Oakland A's, former Ohio State star Nick Swisher has had his moments — big moments.

There was the game-winning homer in the eighth inning against the Cleveland Indians; the diving catch the next day against the Tribe; his first homer in the bigs against Toronto on just his third day with Oakland; and his first big-league hit on the night he came up against the Blue Jays.

The outfielder enjoyed every one of those moments — even the one when he was fined \$1,100 by his teammates upon arriving at the clubhouse.

"That was something I expected (because) I'm a rookie," Swisher told BSB. "They're going to do stuff like that, and I have to go along with it. I'm so happy right now that it doesn't even bother me."

Swisher was the highest-ever draft pick for an Ohio State baseball player after being selected 16th overall in the 2002 first-year player draft. He batted .323 during his career at Ohio State, clubbing 35 homers and knocking in 156 runs. He holds the school record for walks, and that discipline at the plate is one reason the A's liked him.

Swisher is featured prominently in the book "Moneyball," which details how Oakland goes about scouting players. They don't look predominantly at size or speed but rather project statistically based on numbers a player puts up — usually in college. Oakland prefers players who find ways to get on base, and Swisher fits the bill.

When he got the call to leave Triple-A Sacramento and head to Toronto to join the A's, he couldn't contain his excitement.

"It all happened so fast," Swisher said. "I hopped on a plane, connected in



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE OAKLAND ATHLETICS

SWISHER GETS THE CALL — Former Ohio State star Nick Swisher was the 16th overall selection in the 2002 Major League Baseball draft, and he finally got the call to the bigs from Oakland on Sept. 3.



Not Totally Unexpected

Swisher has always had it in his mind that one day he would be a major league baseball player, and with good reason.

His dad, Steve, spent nine seasons in the bigs as a catcher, playing for the Chicago Cubs, St. Louis and San Diego.

Nick was always a standout in athletics but took to baseball a little more than the other sports. Many observers felt it was only a matter of time before the younger Swisher made his mark on the sport, and he proved them right with his standout career at Ohio State.

Seeing the way his father conducted himself, Nick aspired to be a ballplayer almost from the beginning. And all those things his dad told him to expect seem to be coming true.

"He told me there's a way to do things and how things would be, and they're all exactly what he said they'd be," Swisher said. "As I get older, he gets smarter."

Swisher had a reputation early on — and deservedly so — for being a chatterbox, but he's learned over the years that there is a time and place to speak up.

And now is not it. "That just comes with maturity," he said. "I know I always talked a lot, and I still do to a point. But I try to think now before saying something instead of saying the first thing that comes into my head. There's a time to be loud and obnoxious. But I'm a rookie here and I'm doing more listening than anything else."

OSU baseball coach Bob Todd said that from everything he's heard, Swisher has worked hard and deserves what he's getting.

"Talent was never an issue with Nick, so this isn't unexpected," Todd said. "There may have been some maturity things he had to learn and deal with, but it sounds like those are in the past. I'm happy for him. It's great to see Ohio State players get to the major leagues. His challenge is staying there, but I think he has the ability to do that."

In A Comfort Zone

There are a lot of nerves and anxiety

in a big-league debut, and Swisher was not immune to that.

"I lost a bat during batting practice and in my first time up (in the game) I was shaking," he admitted. "I thought I could handle it, but it was really a big deal. I'm slowly getting into a routine here. You can't change too much because it's still baseball. If you get out of what you were doing you're going to press too much, and I don't want to do that."

One thing that made Swisher's first night with the A's more relaxing was the presence of some familiar faces.

Former OSU teammate Lance Rolston and a friend from elementary school, Nate Pierce, made it to his game with a few others.

Having them in the stands was a calming influence.

"To have them there was great," Swisher said. "To look up and see some people you know, in your first big-league game, that made it much easier for me. You can start off with some people rooting for you, and that doesn't happen much, especially on the road. It settled me down."

He had two doubles and a walk that first night, and two days later he smacked his first home run, with Oakland.

"I never thought it was going out," Swisher said of his first career homer. "I just swung and wondered if it had enough. I was going around the bases pretty fast when I saw some teammates telling me to slow down. Then I looked and saw it was gone. You can't plan for something like that, so it all just kind of hit me at once."

There's been talk that if Swisher does well enough in his stint with the A's that he could begin next season with the big club. There's even some whispers about Rookie of the Year honors in 2005.

But that's getting ahead of the game. "I'm just playing hard," Swisher said. "I'm not trying to think about things like that. I'm treating this as an audition even if it isn't. I think I'm good enough to play in this league, but it's up to me to prove it."

Swisher was batting .275 with a pair of homers and eight RBI through Sept. 16, but more important than the numbers, in his mind anyway, is the experience.

"This is helping me tremendously," he said. "It will help me get acclimated for next year, and if I'm up with the club I won't have to feel my way around."

Swisher may finally be reaching the potential many thought he had when he was tearing up the Big Ten, but one thing hasn't changed.

He's still a country boy from Parkersburg, W.Va., playing the game he loves.

"It's still baseball to me," Swisher said. "Yes, the check may be a little bigger but that's not what drives me. I pulled up in my truck and the guys are telling me I need to get a new car and all that stuff."

"But I'm just comfortable in my jeans and cowboy boots, and that's not going to change. It's who I am and who I'll always be."

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OHIO STATE FLASHBACK

From Buckeyes To Bronx Bombers

Swisher Still Getting Used To Life In New York

By DAVID DRIVER

Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

The season was not yet two months old, but Nick Swisher's introduction to being a full-time resident of New York City was hardly routine.

The former Ohio State baseball standout rang the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street, did a flying leap toward fans above the outfield wall in new Yankee Stadium, dealt with a minor elbow injury and even pitched one inning in mop-up duty.

Not bad for a Big Apple debut.

"Playing with the Yankees, you get to do some cool stuff," said Swisher, who is single, lives in Manhattan and peppers most of his sentences with "dude."

In addition to all of the "cool stuff," more important was the early-season offense he provided to his new team as the Yankees played until May 8 without injured third baseman Alex Rodriguez.

"It has just been a lot of fun," Swisher said recently. "New York kind of fits my personality a little bit. It's an awesome town. The fans are great, and it's a great place to play."

Swisher hit seven homers in his first 27 games with the Bronx Bombers after coming over from the White Sox in a trade last November that sent infielder Wilson Betemit and two minor leaguers to Chicago. Swisher didn't go deep for the White Sox for the seventh time in 2008 until the 62nd game of the season. Additionally, each of his first seven homers this season came on the road, and according to the Elias Sports Bureau he was the first Yankee to hit his first seven homers on the road since Bernie Williams did so in 2003.

Through May 28, Swisher had spent most of his time as the Yankees' regular right fielder and was hitting .223 with nine homers and 27 RBI. His play has caught the fancy of some New York fans who have begun a write-in campaign for their favorite player to start in the All-Star Game in St. Louis. They started an Internet site called VoteSwisher.com.

The switch-hitting Swisher homered from

both sides of the plate April 29 against Detroit, marking the eighth time in his six-year career he had done that. He joined Arizona first baseman Tony Clark and Yankees catcher Jorge Posada as the only active players to homer from both sides at least eight times in his career. Clark has been playing 15 years while Posada is a 13-year major league veteran.

Swisher, who spent the first four seasons of his career in Oakland before playing in Chicago last year, said the move to New York has been beneficial for him and it shows. He seems to slap hands with nearly everyone in the clubhouse before a game.

"I think your surroundings have a lot to do with it," he said. "We have quality people in the dugout and with the coaching staff. Obviously, New York is a bigger media market but it is still baseball."

After the trade from Chicago to New York, Swisher decided to spend the offseason in his home state of West Virginia.

"I have two beautiful homes in California, but I went back and lived with my dad (prior to this season)," he said. "I really needed to get back to the basics, and I think I have. I am trying to break out that talent I don't think I have uncovered."

Swisher's father, Steve, is a former major league catcher who had a nine-year career with the Chicago Cubs, St. Louis Cardinals and San Diego Padres. Nick did his regular workouts this past winter but felt the time talking to his father about hitting was helpful.

The younger Swisher began his career in the Oakland system in 2002 after he was taken as the 16th overall pick that June out of Ohio State. Swisher was one of the big bats in the Buckeyes' batting order from 2000-02 when he hit .322 with 35 homers and 156 RBI, helping OSU to the regular-season Big Ten championship in '01 and the conference tournament title in '02. He set career highs as a sophomore in 2001 with 15 homers and 56 RBI to go along with a .492 on-base percentage, and as a junior in 2002, he hit a career-best .348 with 10 homers and 52 RBI.

Swisher was on the fast track with the A's and quickly advanced through Oakland's minor league system, hitting .269 with 29 homers and 92 RBI at Triple-A Sacramento in 2004.

He made his big-league debut with the A's in September of that year, and made the big-league club the following spring and hit .236 with 21 homers and 74 RBI. His best year was 2006 when he hit .254 with 35 homers and 95 RBI.

Swisher raised his average to .262 in



COURTESY OF THE NEW YORK YANKEES/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FITTING IN - Former Ohio State baseball star Nick Swisher has become an integral part of the New York Yankees in his first season with the team. Swisher provided an early-season spark for the Yankees as they waited for MVP third baseman Alex Rodriguez to return from hip surgery.

2007, but his power numbers were down with 22 homers and 78 RBI. That led to Oakland trading him to the White Sox in January 2008 and a rough year in Chicago. He hit only .219 with 24 homers and 69 RBI.

Still, he remains pragmatic about last season.

"I'm kind of glad it happened because it opened my eyes in order to take my work ethic to the next level," Swisher said. He added that he also lost about seven or eight pounds off his 6-0, 194-pound frame before this season.

"I feel good, I feel strong, I feel confident," he said. "It has been a great start to the season."

On May 7, as he took the field in the top of the first at Yankee Stadium, Swisher did a running leap in order to slap hands with New York fans sitting in back of the outfield fence.

"It was just fun," he said. "It was something to get the team going. I didn't stick the landing, though. It was a 'Lambeau Leap' gone wrong."

The next night, the Yankees opened a series in Baltimore and welcomed back Rodriguez, who had missed the first 28 games with a hip injury. The third baseman provided an instant shot of team adrenaline when he smacked a three-run homer on the first pitch he saw from Orioles starter Jeremy Guthrie.

Swisher said having A-Rod back is "huge. You are talking about the best player in baseball."

While Rodriguez was sidelined, Swisher was about the only New York player hitting with any consistency. As a result, the Yankees were 13-15 and trailed by 5½ games in the American League East. Since Rodriguez's return through May 28, the team was 14-5 and tied for first place.

What is Rodriguez like as a teammate?

"I wish everyone else would get to know him the way we do," Swisher said. "He is a great dude. The fact is he is a great guy. When you play against a guy, you look at them differently. He is the most mentally strong guy I have ever met."

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