

Gaining ground and giving back



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The still-emerging baseball career of Florida prep (class of 2015) outfield prospect Desmond Lindsay took a positive turn last summer when he was able to secure a roster spot with the national power EvoShield Canes. His still developing academic and life-skills career took off more than three years earlier when he became the first recipient of a scholarship at The Out-of-Door Academy (ODA).

Lindsay was a decorated participant in 20 Perfect Game events between May 2012 and October 2014 and is a recent graduate of ODA, a prestigious college preparatory school in Sarasota, Fla. He has signed a letter of intent to continue both his baseball and academic careers at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill depending, of course, on what transpires at next week's MLB June First-Year Player Draft.

He has long been on PG's radar as a top 2015 prospect that needed to be watched closely, and he was in the No. 91 spot nationally when his class's updated rankings were released on Sept. 4, 2012. He actually fell back to No. 127 on Feb. 5, 2013, before rallying to No. 96 on Feb. 6, 2014. Heading into the MLB draft, he is ranked the No. 77 overall prospect in the nation, No. 13 overall in Florida and the state's No. 1 first baseman.

Perfect Game National Scouting Coordinator Jheremy Brown named Lindsay the first baseman on the PG High School Florida Region Preseason Dream Team, published Feb. 10. In citing Lindsay, Brown wrote:

"When thinking of a typical first baseman, a strong, power-hitting slugger comes to mind, and the player will usually stay at the position throughout their career. Desmond Lindsay isn't your typical first baseman though as he is highly athletic and is an above average runner with a strong arm, which leads to him spending time in the outfield during the summer travel circuit.

"The University of North Carolina commit does show the power and fast bat often associated with the position, using a low effort right-handed swing to drive the ball to all parts of the field. The swing is easy and repeatable, helping him perform at a high level throughout all the major summer events."

But for every favorable impression Lindsay has left on the field, he's made even more valuable contributions away from it. In 2011, he became the first recipient of ODA's Taylor Emmons Scholarship, courtesy of the Taylor Emmons Scholarship Fund that was created in 2011 by Emmons' parents, Mike and Katie Emmons.

Taylor Emmons was an ODA graduate and former baseball and golf standout who was a freshman at the University of Miami in Coral Gables when on Dec. 5, 2010, he was struck and killed by a motorist while walking back to his residence not far from the U of M campus.

Lindsay has been forever grateful for being the first ODA student to benefit from the scholarship fund, and in a 16-month period between early January 2014 and early April 2015, he used his baseball prowess to help raise nearly \$44,000 for the fund.

"I thought that it would be a good opportunity to give back to the Emmons for giving me the scholarship to ODA. I wouldn't have been able to be (at ODA) without it," Lindsay told PG during a telephone conversation this week. "When (the Emmons) do so much for you it's kind of hard to be able to say 'thank-you' just by saying 'thank-you' – just doesn't feel like you're thanking them enough."

He began his fund-raising endeavors when he agreed to participate in the 8th annual Power Showcase Home Run Derby in Miami in January 2104. He was required to choose a nonprofit organization or foundation to benefit from his participation in the event, and he just naturally chose the Taylor Emmons Scholarship Fund. With the help of pledges and sponsorships from throughout the community, he was able to individually raise \$16,500 at the Power Showcase alone.

This spring, Lindsay helped organize the inaugural Taylor Emmons Memorial Baseball Classic and Home Run Derby, an eight-team tournament played at ODA from March 30-April 2. He used it as another opportunity to raise money for the Emmons scholarship fund, and with the entire community once again behind the effort, an additional \$27,600 was brought in.

Sandy Albano, the Executive Director of the Taylor William Emmons Memorial Foundation, Inc., who shared with PG the total amount of money raised, praised not only Lindsay's fund-raising efforts but also his impeccable character.

"To list all of Desmond's accomplishments ... would only graze the surface of the integrity, poise and grace (with) which he handles every situation," Albano wrote in a recent correspondence with PG. "You not only get a stellar athlete with this young man but also a remarkable person who truly cares about his community, getting involved and making a difference in the lives of those around him."

He's had a good upbringing. Lindsay, who calls Bradenton, Fla., home, has been raised by his single mother, Robin Lindsay, and he likes to say he owes her a debt of gratitude.

"She's meant everything to me," he said. "With baseball, the other parents even in Little League were always getting on (the other kids) for making mistake and stuff, but she's always been supportive of anything I try to do. Even on the field, if I don't have a good game she doesn't really try to get on me, or anything like that. She just supports any decision I make and that's really helped me."

Lindsay first enrolled at The Out-of-Door Academy as a seventh-grader and wound up spending six years there. He characterizes the experience as "different" in the respect that ODA is an independent, college preparatory school that is very much academically oriented.

But he excelled in both the sporting realm and in the classroom. An athletic 6-foot, 200-pounder with 6.5-second speed in the 60-yard dash, Lindsay previously played football and basketball but said goodbye to the gridiron his freshman year and adios to the hardwood as a sophomore. Baseball was and remains his passion.

He tore a hamstring just seven games into his senior baseball season this spring and was out for the year. He recently completed therapy sessions that helped the injury heal and just this week his therapists gave him the go-ahead to start running again.

"It was a little tough athletics-wise to really get the same exposure and the same amount of experience that other kids get at a bigger public high school in regard to facing better competition and things like that," he said of ODA baseball career. "My summer ball (experiences) helped a lot with that."

His PG summer ball career began at the 2012 16u PG WWBA East Memorial Day Classic in Fort Myers, Fla., when Lindsay was playing with Team IMPACT 16u. He continued his association with the Florida-based Team IMPACT organization throughout 2012 and 2013, and was named to the all-tournament team at the 2013 16u PG BCS Finals in Fort Myers, playing with that group.

Lindsay played with Marucci Elite at the 2013 PG WWBA Underclass World Championship (he was named to the all-tournament team) in Fort Myers, and with Team EvoShield at the 2013 PG WWBA World Championship in Jupiter, Fla. He kicked off the summer of 2014 at the PG National Showcase in Fort Myers and then prepared to join the EvoShield Canes.

Despite the fact that he had distinguished himself with all-tournament performances while playing with Team IMPACT and Marucci Elite – not to mention that he had just made his commitment to North Carolina – Lindsay admitted to some nervousness when he joined the Canes for the 2014 17u PG WWBA National Championship in Emerson, Ga.

For perhaps the first time in his baseball career, he was feeling some self-doubt. He just wasn't sure if he was going to fit in with the talented group of Canes, one that included eventual Perfect Game All-Americans and potential first-round draft picks Mike Nikorak, Ashe Russell, Beau Burrows, and Ryan Johnson. He especially felt that way around the other position players, most of whom played together in 2013. The nervousness – the self-doubt – dissipated as rapidly as it had set in.

"Once I started playing on that team, it was expected that you would perform (at a high level)," Lindsay said. "There was no question if you were going to do it or not, and that really helped me with my confidence; it just changed the way I play."

Hollywood's most imaginative minds couldn't have scripted a better debut performance than the one Lindsay enjoyed at the 17u PG WWBA National Championship last July 4-11.

He was named the premier event's Most Valuable Player after batting 12-for-31 (.387), with three home runs, a triple, two doubles, 10 RBI and nine runs scored while posting a 1.306 on-base-plus-slugging (OPS) percentage. He had an RBI double in the Canes' 5-2 championship game victory over Elite Squad 17u Prime, capping a 12-0 tournament run for the Canes.

Next up for Lindsay and the Canes was another PG national championship tournament, the 17u Perfect Game World Series in Goodyear, Ariz. The Canes finished as runner-up to the Houston (Texas) Banditos and Lindsay was again named all-tournament.

He participated at both the non-PG East Coast Professional Showcase in Syracuse, N.Y., and the Area Code Games in Long Beach, Calif., in early August before rejoining the Canes at the PG WWBA World Championship in Jupiter in late October.

The Canes rolled to their second 2014 PG national championship at the tournament, winning eight straight games against some of the best travel ball teams in the country, including an 8-2 victory over the Orlando Scorpions/Mets Scout Team in the championship game. Lindsay was once again named to the all-tournament team.

"Up until this point it is probably the best baseball experience I've had playing on a team," Lindsay said of the months he spent with the Canes. "It was just so much fun – the coaches were awesome – and it helps a lot that we didn't really lose all summer. Playing with them definitely gave me a different edge (mentally) than I'd had before as a player."

Lindsay committed to UNC during the summer before his junior year in high school. He said he immediately fell in love with Chapel Hill during his first trip to campus and knew that was where he wanted to continue his education and baseball career.

Next week's MLB June Amateur Draft will have something to say about Lindsay's future at North Carolina, however. Perfect Game ranks Lindsay as the No. 216 overall (college, juco, high school) prospect in the draft, which projects to a selection somewhere in rounds six-through-eight. In ranking Lindsay No. 216, PG's scouting department wrote:

"Lindsay is an intriguing puzzle to figure out for scouts. He is an extremely strong young man who makes very loud and hard contact from the right side, but most of that contact is mid- to opposite-field oriented. In addition, he's played mostly first base on defense but has 6.5 speed in the 60-yard dash with athleticism that is much better suited for the outfield and perhaps even center field. A team drafting Lindsay will have to have both a plan for a more all-field approach and an idea as to where his best defensive position might be, but there is no shortage of tools to work with."

Lindsay said he will definitely be watching the draft when it begins on Monday, but mostly because he's interested to learn when he'll hear the names of several of his former Canes' teammates called; PG All-American pitchers Nikorak, Russell and Burrows are all projected first-rounders. And as for himself?

"I've thought about it and it's definitely a great opportunity to have," he said. "But going to college is a great opportunity, too, so if I get picked I'll have to cross that road when it comes. Either way, I'm really not banking on anything."

Those who got to know Lindsay away from the country's baseball fields have little doubt things will work out well for the talented ballplayer – and community fund-raiser – regardless of the draft's outcome.

"(Desmond) is a believer that he is responsible for his own destiny and has the ability and resourcefulness to positively impact his future," the Taylor Emmons Memorial Foundation's Albano wrote. "It is rare to find a young man, at the age of 18, who is accountable in the life he is creating for himself and who is passionate about helping others, but Desmond is sure making it look effortless."