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### MINORS

## BEWARE THE JAGUAR

Cubs trade already paying dividends as Kevin Alcantara shines in his first full season of pro ball.

by JASON YODER

It's not everyday you see a 6'6" outfielder in professional baseball, or at any level of baseball for that matter -- and it's even more rare that you find one playing centerfield. With a rare combination of size, speed and power, it's fitting that Alcantara has nicknamed himself, "Jaguar".

Kevin Alcantara hopes to follow in the large but exclusive footsteps of fellow taller-than-average big leaguers such as Aaron Judge, Dave Winfield, Richie Sexson, Joel Guzman and even more recently, Oneil Cruz.

After signing with the Yankees for \$1 million as part of the 2018 International Signing class, it was easy to picture Alcantara following the path laid out by Judge that would lead to donning the heralded pinstripes for the Bronx Bombers. But like many young players in professional baseball, the pandemic limited much needed at-bats and experience, and spent his first 3 seasons in rookie leagues before being acquired as the key piece in the trade that sent beloved Chicago Cubs first baseman, Anthony Rizzo, to the Yankees in 2021.

Despite only playing in 34 games in 2021, Alcantara showed signs of why he was such a promising international prospect coming out of the Dominican Republic as a lanky 16-yr old in 2018, hitting a combined .345 with 5 home runs, 24 RBI's and 5 steals between the Yankees and Cubs Rookie League teams.

After a slow start to the 2022 season in his first full season of professional baseball, that saw Alcantara hit .224/.333/.345 in the month of April, there may have been concerns as to whether he would be able to make the necessary adjustments to the higher level of pitching in the Low-A Carolina League.

Those concerns were quickly put to rest after a May campaign that saw the talented outfielder hit .304/.371/.587 with 6 long balls and 23 RBI's, to go along with 3 stolen bases.

He had a career day in mid June when the Pelicans paid a visit to the Carolina Mudcats, exploding for a 4-hit game that included 2 home runs, 8 RBI's, and 12 total bases. The second of his two 3-run homers had an exit velocity of 103 mph and travelled an estimated 404 feet as it crashed into the leftfield scoreboard. It was the young outfielder's first multi-homer game of his career. He showed off his speed early in the contest, lashing a 2-run triple to right-centerfield and adding to the Pelicans five-run first inning, culminating in a 15-6 win over the hometown Mudcats.

While he cooled off considerably down the stretch, Alcantara still compiled a .273/.360/.451 line while establishing career highs in nearly every offensive category including home runs (15), RBI's (85), and stolen bases (14).

After coming over in a Trade Deadline deal that sent Anthony Rizzo to the Yankees in 2021, Alcantara has quickly established himself as one of the top prospects in the Cubs organization.

Despite falling a bit short in the Carolina League playoffs, Alcantara helped lead Myrtle Beach to the first half division title, and finished the season with an impressive 78-53 overall record.

With above-average tools almost across the board, Alcantara runs very well for his size, and thanks to his large strides can cover a great deal of territory in the outfield. While he projects to be able to remain in center, if he does happen to lose a step, his arm strength should still profile well as a solid corner outfielder. He possesses a great baseball IQ and takes excellent routes to compliment his speed and athleticism.

While it would be easy to rattle off Aaron Judge as a comp for Alcantara, given their size and connection to the Yankees, or even the ultra-athletic, Dave Winfield, the "Jaguar" possesses a very unique skill set for a player of his size. He certainly reminds many of the Pirates young shortstop, Oneil Cruz, and despite the glaring difference in Cruz batting left-handed versus Alcantara squaring up from the right side of the plate, there are definitely a lot of very similar physical qualities. Alcantara profiles with less power and doesn't possess the arm strength of Cruz, but still rates as an overall better defender between the two players.

Alcantara doesn't have to look far within the Cubs organization to find someone that might be a helpful resource in his development as a tall athletic outfielder and similar upside, as Brennen Davis' basketball background and his 6'4" frame may lend itself well to envisioning how the young Alcantara may fill out physically. While Davis has nearly 30 pounds on him, as he ages and gets stronger it's easy to picture Alcantara reaching and exceeding 200 lbs while filling out his large 6'6" frame.

After his strong 2022 season, Alcantara has already moved up the Cubs prospect rankings, joining his fellow trade acquisition, Pete Crow-Armstrong in the Top 5 of most such lists. And given the defensive prowess of Crow-Armstrong, any potential move for Alcantara to a corner outfield spot may be facilitated more so due to PCA's refined defensive skills than any shortcomings in Alcantara's game.

Either way, thanks to some excellent trades by Jed Hoyer and the Cubs front office, there is now an excellent collection of outfield talent in the organization, headlined by players like Alcantara. ■