



BELLINGER RINGS TRUE

Outfielder-first baseman emerges as top power prospect BY CARY OSBORNE

If it hadn't been for teenage wunderkind Julio Urias, 20-year-old Cody Bellinger would have had the distinction of being the youngest player in the Dodger clubhouse on the first day of 2016 Major League Spring Training camp at Camelback Ranch in February.

The Dodgers always had a hunch he'd become a powerful force — even after he tallied four total home runs in his first two seasons at the bottom levels of the organization. It was just a matter of guiding him there.

Now, after a 2015 season in which he hit 30 home runs for High-A Rancho Cucamonga, Bellinger is the biggest power threat in the Dodger minor-league system and the No. 6 rated first-base prospect in baseball, according to MLB.com.

"I think the biggest difference was, (after) being in professional baseball for over two years, the game kind of slows down," said Bellinger, who began the 2016 regular season with Double-A Tulsa. "You get your feet wet. You get comfortable. But I also



made some adjustments with our hitting coordinator, Damon Mashore."

Before the Dodgers selected Bellinger in the fourth round of the 2013 draft, they



Cody Bellinger followed up a 30-home run season in High-A in 2015 with an impressive Spring Training to start 2016.

witnessed a lower-half explosion, combined with athleticism and a long 6-foot-4-inch frame, that made them believe he would develop into a power hitter.

But it wasn't until before the 2015 season, when Mashore worked with Bellinger to speed up his bat and get his upper half to work in harmony with his legs and hips, that Bellinger would make good on the organization's hunch.

On the minor-league side of Camelback Ranch, where the clubhouse is tighter, and names are absent from the backs of players' jerseys, Bellinger took the first steps to getting to the other side.

"Synching up his body with that swing really produces power," Mashore said. "I just taught him how to create energy with his hands and use his back elbow. We basically call it a running-back elbow, using it to reconnect with his legs to get the most amount of force going linear."

The action with the elbow, along with a slight lowering of Bellinger's hands, work in tandem with his already excellent base to create an acceleration of the bat's barrel, and therefore, a faster path to the baseball. Bellinger has a natural uppercut, and when everything comes together — bang.



Mashore gives Bellinger credit for not only listening to the advice, but following through and sticking with adjustments even during some down times.

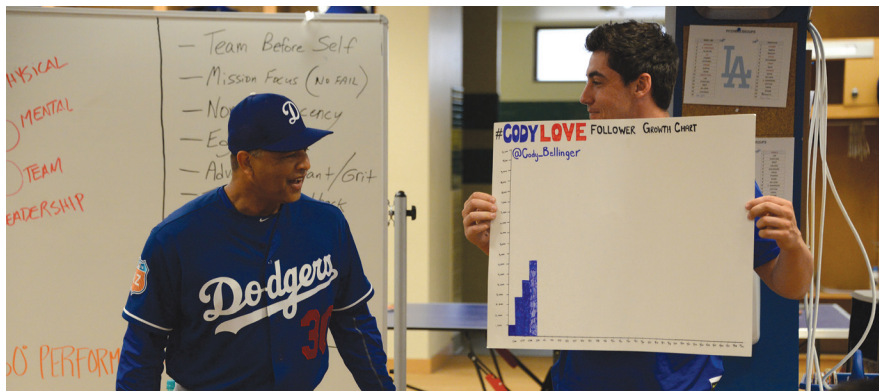
Bellinger didn't hit a home run until his 49th at-bat of 2015. He also struck out 150 times on the season. But Mashore knew there was going to be some bad with the good. He thought the adjustments would lead to Bellinger hitting 23 to 25 home runs last season, and the kid went out and exceeded that.

Bellinger is confident that he can carry the power up with him to another level.

"I know the hitter I am," Bellinger said. "I'm a line-drive-first type of hitter. That didn't change last year. ... The type of hitter I am, I'm not going to change my approach. We'll see where it goes. I know we have some natural loft, so we'll see."

Bellinger also has natural talent. His father, Clay Bellinger, won a World Series with the Yankees in 2000 as a utilityman. In 2007, Cody played on the Chandler (Arizona) National Little League team that reached the Little League World Series. He also had the benefit of being around pro baseball players in numerous settings.

As a sophomore in high school, he accompanied his father to a faith-based re-



Bellinger was coached by his father Clay in the 2007 Little League World Series (below), before getting some love this year from manager Dave Roberts at Spring Training.



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treat for baseball players. Adrian Gonzalez was there. Bellinger remembers playing poker with Gonzalez — though he doubts the Dodger first baseman would recall.

“I was nervous,” Bellinger said of his interaction with Gonzalez. “Being in the same room as Adrian Gonzalez was pretty special.”

As it was in Spring Training this season, when Bellinger received an invite to big league camp as a non-roster player.

“I was the young guy. I didn’t want to ask a hundred questions,” Bellinger said. “I kind of picked (Gonzalez’s) brain a little bit, but not too much. Other than that, I went out there and watched how he went about his business.”

Bellinger said Gonzalez was one of his favorite players as a child.

“The way he goes about his business is unreal,” Bellinger said. “He’s one of the best. He’s just so consistent. He’s had the same swing for 12 years, same approach. He doesn’t change anything. The pregame approach is fun to watch.”

Bellinger went 11 for 28 at the plate for the Dodgers this spring with two home runs, ranked second on the team with nine walks and even earned some attention on Twitter from a “#CodyLove” campaign started by his big-league teammates.

He began his stint in Tulsa on the disabled list with a little hip irritation, but it was nothing serious. It gave him time to reflect on his time with the big league club.

“I wanted to be seen and not heard,” Bellinger said. “I wanted to show the coaching staff and everybody that they can trust me if they do want to call me up there, and that was my main goal.”

It was quite a sight — one that has a lot of people looking forward.