

"OPEN MATT"

Matty Gourlay gets some insight from Travis Blackley.....



Matt: What is Mexico like?

Travis: Mexico is different to anywhere else I have played in the world. The passion for the game is high and better than most places I have played. The emphasis on winning over development here is a joke. A few bad games and you could find yourself without a job in a heartbeat. The atmosphere is great. Between 5000 and 10000 fans a game with some of the bigger cities drawing between 15 – 20K.

Matt: *What team are you playing for?*

Travis: My team, the Pericos de Puebla has been a standout top team of the league since I have been here. With a record of 68 – 32 over the 1st 100 games, we are a half game up on another top team Leones de Yucatan who have been on our coat tails all season long. We have a crucial 3 game series against them this weekend which could determine who finishes in 1st place.

Matt: *What is the standard compared to?*

Travis: The level of competition is hard to explain. The average game is that of a AAA standard but occasionally, we have a game played at a higher level. Then there are games that feel like A ball standard. Overall, it would be considered a AAA level.

The style of play here is quite different to anywhere else I have played. My teams opt to pitch to our team with a steady diet of breaking balls over establishing a fastball. Can be a little boring to watch as to me that is pitching scared and normally only works out the 1st time through the lineup. Most hitters in this league have slider bat speed. Because of this, it is a little easier to pitch off your fastball. Most homeruns come from off speed pitches left up in the zone.

The ball parks here are mostly standard size. But with many parks here being at a higher altitude, homeruns aren't hard to give up. My home park in Puebla is 8000ft above sea level. 2 miles up in the air. So the ball carries really well.

We are in Cancun at the moment which is at sea level and the humidity is ridiculous making balls not carry well. Breaking ball break better and the scores are generally lower.

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Pitching in Puebla has its added difficulties with less break on off speed pitches due to the thinner air. Even running and working out in Puebla takes it out of you much quicker.

Matt: *Are you a starter or reliever?*

Travis: I have been starting down here since I got here. Pitching wise, I have felt like I have thrown the ball really well. My number don't quite tell the story of how well it has gone. My record is 7 and 7 which isn't anything special but I have lost some close games 1-0 and 2-1. In a perfect world, I think I could be about 12 and 3.

I have given up quite a few infield hits and weak flair shots to the shallow outfield.

The fielders here are decent but the tougher plays that major leaguers make look easy don't often get made here. I have managed to keep the ball in the park considering the altitude only allowing 3 long balls in over 100 innings. It has been the infield singles and flairs that have hurt me.

The umpiring here has been all but atrocious most of the time. There are some very racist umpires here that favor Mexican born players. Not just for pitchers but for hitters also. My strike zone is closer to 15 inches where our import hitters sometimes hit with a 20 inch plate. It makes it tougher to do what we do but it's something you just have to deal with over here.

Matt: *Do you get to swing the bat?*

Travis: I don't get to hit here. We have a full time DH.

Matt: *Will your team be in the playoffs?*

Travis: My team has secured a playoff berth but it is unclear if we will have home field advantage. If we make it to the championship series, we won't have home field as the Northern Division won the All Star game meaning whoever represents that division will get it. We aren't worried at all as we have a better road record than a home one. They are both very good however.

Matt: *Is your Spanish getting better?*

Travis: My Spanish is coming along nicely. I can normally get by when ordering food or directing a taxi to where to go. I still have trouble putting together full sentences to have a normal conversation. But I can speak broken Spanglish to get by.

Matt: *What are the plans for the off season?*

Travis: My offseason will be spent down here in Mexico most of the time as I will be playing winter ball with the Naranjeros de Hermosillo. I will be taking a month off to go back for the birth of my son. But will spend October and December down here playing.

Matt: *And what will be happening in 2017?*

Travis: 2017 is still up in the air. I would love to get another chance to play in Korea again. Not sure if that will happen or not but that is goal. Ultimately, I would love to be in the Major Leagues again.

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I still believe I can pitch at that level. The problem is that the US has gotten very young. There isn't a lot of room on rosters for a 33+ year old player regardless of if they can help at that level. If nothing pans out on that front, I will likely return and play down here. Not ideal but it pays the bills. I highly doubt I could make this kind of money working 9 to 5. Nor could I handle it as I have been strapping on a uniform for the last 16 years.

Just hoping to stay healthy and do what I love for as long as I can get paid to do it!

***Thank you Travis for giving us an in-depth look into baseball in Mexico.
We wish you all the best for the remainder this season and all look forward to meeting your son
when he arrives!***