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Mariners Seahawks Sounders Storm College Little Heroes 4 Friday Football

Multi-talented Broussard an asset or trade bait for Mariners?



Ben Broussard races to first base on a grounder against the San Diego Padres in the second inning of a spring training game Saturday, March 3.

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By Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) - Oh, yes, Ben Broussard can play.

Guitar, that is. Bass. Electric. Acoustic.

As for baseball, the Mariners have been trying to find out this spring whether their power hitter without a place to play can be a right fielder.

Seattle wouldn't mind if Broussard, stuck behind Richie Sexson at first base and Jose Vidro at designated hitter, emerged as insurance if newly acquired right fielder Jose Guillen's surgically repaired throwing arm doesn't fully rebound this spring. Guillen's played just three games in the outfield this month at spring training in Arizona.

Broussard, 30, is entering his first full Mariners season after Seattle traded Shin-Soo Choo and Shawn Nottingham to Cleveland for him last July. He hasn't played outfield in a regular season game in 2 1/2 years, and that was in left field. He has never played right, in 580 major league games.

He's played the guitar far more than that.

In 2005, Lazy Bones Recordings produced an album that Broussard wrote in hotel rooms during baseball road trips. It's simply titled "Ben Broussard." He plays guitar, bass guitar and keyboards. He also sings on the album, from which some proceeds go to Broussard's charitable foundation.

A&E Television's reality show "Dog the Bounty Hunter" gave Broussard's album its first national splash. And NBC television recently featured it on its new drama about four working-class Irish brothers, "The Black Donnellys."

"So that's cool that people like it so much," Broussard said.

You can sample his sound at benbroussard.com. It's selling for \$16.99 on Amazon.com, where a customer review from this month gives it five stars and says: "Really good CD. If you like Pete Yorn, you will definitely like Ben."

But can Ben be Pete Rose - or even just Pete Incaviglia - too?

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When asked what he knew about Broussard as an outfielder earlier this month, Mariners manager Mike Hargrove said only, "He's played outfield before."

Or is Broussard getting a March showcase to other teams that may be intrigued to trade for his sudden versatility? Or his .346 batting average and .424 on-base percentage in 17 spring games entering Thursday, after his career-high 21 home runs and 63 RBIs in 144 games for the Indians and Mariners last season? Seattle is rumored to be interested in acquiring San Francisco reliever Armando Benetiz for its sore-armed bullpen.

"Right now, I'm a Mariner. That's where my heart is," Broussard said recently, acknowledging he's heard the suggestion that he may be traded before opening day.

"I just feel like I can work myself into the lineup somewhere. As far as if I'd rather play all the time? Of course."

He was playing most of the time in Cleveland, as the Indians' platoon first baseman against right-handed pitching. He made 112 starts at first in 2005 and 107 there in '04. His first full season in the major leagues, in 2003, he split time with Travis Hafner.

But Seattle has Sexson and his \$55 million contract entrenched at first base. And Vidro, a career .301 hitter, has arrived from Washington to rest his sore knees as the Mariners' designated hitter.

So it's to the outfield for Broussard, where the former nursing major at McNeese State in Louisiana debuted for Cleveland in 2002. After Cincinnati traded its former second-round draft choice for Russell Branyan that June, Broussard made his first major league start on June 23, 2002, in left field at Montreal.

Three nights later, Broussard found himself playing in front of the notoriously tricky "Green Monster" left-field wall at Boston's Fenway Park. He badly misplayed a fly ball - and heard all about it.

"Yeah, I made one mistake, and people climbed all over me," Broussard said of the rabid Red Sox fans.

"Then I hit my first home run, off Pedro Martinez (later that night). That kind of shut them up."

That power is why Seattle traded for him last July - and why they may want to keep him, now that he's showing right field may be an option. He began working there during batting practices late last season.

Hargrove once made the transition from first baseman to outfielder, in 1975 when he was playing for Cleveland. He said mastering the proper routes to fly balls is Broussard's biggest challenge.

Or at least as big a challenge as Broussard not playing every day. But Broussard knows that can change as quickly as a guy can get traded - or find his record being played on national TV.

"There's so many things that can happen," Broussard said. "(Who knows what) bridge we'll cross during the season?"

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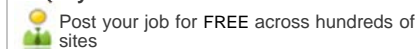
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