



[Big League Stew](#)

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## Nice pick: Rangers select paralyzed Georgia player in 33rd round

By ['Duk](#)

The University of Georgia may be located in the middle of [Atlanta Braves](#) Country, but the [Texas Rangers](#) just picked up more than a few new fans in Athens.

Heck, the Rangers will be admired across the whole country, really, after they used their 33rd-round selection in MLB's amateur draft to select Bulldogs junior outfielder Johnathan Taylor on Wednesday afternoon.

Normally that wouldn't be very newsworthy, but Taylor is paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a wheelchair after a tragic on-field collision with teammate Zach Cone in early March.

After selecting Cone with the 37th overall pick on Monday, the Texas front office told him they were thinking it'd be nice to also draft Taylor as a show of support as he rehabs and works toward the dream of being able to walk again.

They were right — and they made it happen on Wednesday.

[From GeorgiaDogs.com:](#)

"This was truly a classy move and a great gesture on the part of the Texas Rangers organization," said Georgia coach David Perno. "J.T. is definitely a player worthy of getting drafted. He's been a big part of our program, and we are all very excited for him. When I talked to him after he got the call, he was in the middle of his rehabilitation work, laughing and having a good time and was thrilled to be drafted."

Johnathan's mother, Tandra Taylor, described the news as "awesome" and said her son's face "lit up" when he heard about the pick. Taylor is in rehab after injuring the C-5 and C-6 vertebrae in his neck during a game on March 6 against Florida State. Because his spinal cord was not severed, doctors believe [there is room for improvement](#).

Baseball teams routinely use later-round picks to symbolically draft players who may never play for them, like the son of a manager or someone else in the organization. In 1993, then-[Chicago White Sox](#) GM Ron Schueler [selected his daughter](#), a softball star, in the 43rd round. Five years earlier, Tommy Lasorda famously used a 62nd-round pick on a little-known catcher as a favor to a family friend. (Guy by the name of Mike Piazza.)

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The Rangers' selection of Taylor was a token selection and a way to show support, yes. But it was also a way of saying they knew of the talent that he possessed before the accident. An honor roll student his first two seasons, Taylor had a .312 career batting average over 117 games for Georgia and may have had a future on the diamond.

Georgia considered — and still considers — Taylor to be the "soul" of their program.

"Anyone who ever saw J.T. play knows that if he didn't have this tragic accident, he was going to play pro ball at some point," Perno [told ESPN.com's Mark Schlabach](#).

The Rangers agreed with that sentiment:

"We thought selecting Johnathan was the right thing to do," Rangers director of amateur scouting Kip Fagg said. "We would have drafted him either way, regardless of any other circumstances involving his injury or Zach's draft status. Our area scout in Georgia, Ryan Coe, has had a relationship with Johnathan since he was a high school player. The club has always liked his passion and ability as a player."

At any rate, there are hundreds of high school and college ballplayers getting great phone calls this week as they're drafted into a chance of making the big leagues. While Johnathan Taylor's call may not have come exactly how he imagined it would, it's still pretty cool that the Rangers took the time to remember him. Well done.

**UPDATE:** CBS' C. Trent Rosecrans notes that the Rangers [may have started a trend](#). In the 40th round, the [Houston Astros](#) selected San Jacinto College reliever Buddy Lamothe, who had a 0.86 ERA before being paralyzed in a recreational accident