



Mashers And Tickle Monsters

by Brian Stull

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(Busch Stadium) Don't spend too much time getting caught up in the nickname debate for this latest edition of rookies on the St. Louis Cardinals. The bottom line is that they're contributing on the field and have been a big part of the team drawing near the .500 mark after the slow start this season.

"A lot of it's just confidence with each other and comfortability, just knowing that we can play for each other and play well," said Paul DeJong, who offered ["Memphis Mashers"](#) as their moniker. "Also, we just have good players in the system. Everyone comes up here and knows what we've got to do, knows what the goal is. We just come in and get right down to business, but have fun doing it."

In the last three games, the four players have combined to hit .370 (10-27) but have had provided a bigger influence with their style of play and energy.

"You talk about that 'next wave' and stuff like that, everyone's just out here doing their job," said Bader. "I don't want to think about this 'new wave' that's going to take everything over. That's not what it is at all. It's just about another group of guys doing the same the guys before us were doing. I look up to those guys."

But the connection is undeniable. Similar to the likes of Allen Craig, Daniel Descalso, David Freese, and Jon Jay or even Greg Garcia, Randal Grichuk, and Stephen Piscotty, there is a bond that is shared between this group of players.

Bader and DeJong met at the airport in Chicago and flew to Peoria together after being promoted to Single-A and then were roommates.

“Definitely a lot of those same philosophies,” said Bader. “He’s the man. He’s a great personality off the field. He’s helped me a lot too, just in terms of approach and everything you think about. He keeps things simple and he’s very relaxed. He really is very mature beyond his age.”

It’s a similar story for Kelly and Voit, who were teammates at State College in 2013.

“That was actually when I was catching and he was playing the infield,” pointed out Voit. “The next year I played with him in Palm Beach and that’s when we kind of became really good friends. Then we ended up living together in Spring Training and stuff. I lived with him last year in Springfield—him and Pauly are probably two of my best friends.”

The foursome then solidified last year while all were playing together in Springfield.

“With all of us putting up good numbers, all of us going to the All-Star game in Double-A,” said Voit. “We’re always the ones making fun of each other, we kind of are like that little fraternity of brotherhood. Keeping each other’s minds in the right spots—just doing everything together, honestly, with baseball. Hitting together, lifting together, going to dinner together, going to breakfast kind of thing. Just a common interest between us all.”

“It’s comfortable,” echoed Kelly. “You feel like you’ve played with these guys your entire life. We always give each other crap and that’s something that keeps it loose, which has been a lot of fun.”

So who of the group is given the most trouble?

“Probably Paul,” said Kelly. “We all gang up on Paul every once in a while.”

That being said, Harrison Bader received the brunt of their trouble after last night’s game.

“We were giving Bader a lot of crap yesterday for his tickles,” shared Kelly. “He did have three hits, but his speed helps out. Tickle Monster. He’s a big Tickle Monster, that’s what we call it.”

The Tickle Monster also has a move—holding the hands up and wiggling the fingers while on base.

“It’s like he’s trying to wake up from a small nap, that’s how it is,” added Kelly. “If somebody hits it off the end or jam shot, it’s called the Tickle Monster. Like if it falls in front of the outfielder.”

“I love it because you’ve hit so many balls on the nose before and they don’t kind of land—in some universe that we created in our heads, they kind of all level out,” said Bader.

“They say I take the cake sometimes,” said Kelly. “But I’ve seen Bader get jammed—bases loaded, this is in Memphis, gets jammed. Pitcher, because he follows through, does a full jump, misses it, and the ball landed on top of the mound and he got a hit.”

“I hit it off the logo and it landed like a grenade right behind the mound,” confirmed Bader with a smile. “It like stopped before anybody touched it. That was by far the greatest hit I’ve ever gotten in my life. But last night was pretty good too. The check swing double the line, never had one of those before so covering all grounds, you know what I mean?”

Passing back by Voit, it was mentioned that Kelly had shared about the Tickle Monster. “Oh yeah, Bader had three tickles last night,” he responded matter-of-factly.

Just a reminder that each of these four players had at least 10 home runs this season at Memphis.

“Hey, you’re going to take any hit—doesn’t matter what it is,” said Kelly. “If it’s a tickle, if it’s a hard hit. One of those broken bat flares, those keep you in it. You’ve got to mix those in when you can. That’s just kind of the game we play with each other just to keep it fun and keep it loose.”

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