



Wong Happy to Lead-Off

by Brian Stull

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Almost from the moment the St. Louis Cardinals traded for Jason Heyward the question was raised, who will bat lead-off? Heyward filled the role for the Atlanta Braves last season and Matt Carpenter did so for the Cardinals. Both have expressed a willingness to bat anywhere Mike Matheny pencils them into the lineup, but Heyward has shared how he was groomed to bat in the middle of the lineup and Carpenter has also explained that he plans to be [more aggressive](#) this season regarding his power numbers.

Jon Jay also has experience in the role, but what about Kolten Wong?

“Oh, I’m all for it,” responded Wong when asked about the idea at the Winter Warm-Up. “If that’s what Mike wants me to do, I’ll figure it out. I’ve done lead-off in some previous years—it’s definitely a different approach but it’s definitely something I’m 100% on board for.”

The Cardinals leading base-stealer last season with 20, Wong has set a goal to surpass that total in 2015. In addition, he understands the need to raise his batting (.249) and on-base percentages (.292).

“Obviously, I need to work on my approach as a lead-off hitter—it’s a lot different. You’re a table-setter, you want to see some pitches and allow the team to understand what this pitcher has during that day.”

But with Matt Carpenter’s comfort in batting with two strikes, if he were to slide back a spot in the order it could afford Wong—or anyone else batting lead-off, more of an opportunity to steal.

“He’s probably one of the best lead-off hitters we’ve had,” said Wong. “To have someone like him—if he does move down in the lineup—he’d be perfect for me to pick his brain a little bit.”

Though too early for him to fully engage, Matheny acknowledged the lineup possibilities are fun to think about but he reminded how key that on-base percentage is.

“Kolten down the line—we’ve obviously seen the power, we’ve seen the speed,” said Matheny. “I believe that he could show us something completely different from what he’s done in the past, he’s still a young player. He could be a guy that’s in any one of those positions and do it very well, but right now we have some guys certainly with the way JJ (Jay) went about his at-bats and obviously Matt Carpenter. Now you have Jason and Holliday and Adams. We could throw Jhonny Peralta in there anywhere—you could throw Yadi in there anywhere. It’s just a great problem to have.”

And it’s no problem at all for the second baseman.

“I’m just excited, wherever Mike puts me—he could put me 9th batter and I’d be ready to go,” reiterated Wong. “I’m just excited to be here. If first batter’s where I’m going to be, perfect. Wherever else, more than happy to do it.”

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