

A's Michael Taylor: KNBR intern out of right field

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Early in Michael Taylor's stint as an intern with KNBR, he found himself confronted by a homeless man, who started screaming into Taylor's microphone.

It was an unusual situation for a professional athlete.

"The guy was getting really close to me and I stepped back and thought, 'Am I going to have to hit this guy?' " the A's outfielder said last week from the relative safety of KNBR's lobby. "I was looking - 'Does he have a weapon on him?' But we actually wound up playing it on the air. It was pretty funny."

Taylor made the startling moment work to his advantage, which is really the whole point of his internship at the all-sports station. The Stanford alum figured that because he finished last season healthy and didn't need to do extensive daily rehab, he should fill his down time with something that might serve him well down the line.

"We have a lot of time off and I felt like, 'Why not be productive?' " Taylor said. "This gives me experience in a world I'd like to know something about. One of my best friends told me, 'You're the only guy I know who goes to the big leagues for the first time and then gets a job interning for free. What's wrong with you?' "

Taylor, 25, has always had an interest in the media, but didn't have time in college to pursue it, so he figured, why not now? His agent, Brodie Van Wagenen, is friends with former A's outfielder and current KNBR host Eric Byrnes, so 680 found itself with a very tall, broad-shouldered intern.

Under the radar

And no one knew who he was.

"I never told anyone he played professionally," KNBR assistant program director Jenn Violet Kennedy said. "I was walking him around the building saying, 'This is my intern, Michael,' or, 'This is Michael, he needs to fill out some paperwork.' And everyone would say, 'OK,' and keep going."

Even Byrnes didn't know. Van Wagenen had told him one of his "young players" was interested in interning. Byrnes assumed that was a low-level minor-leaguer, maybe just out of high school.

"I found out a week after he'd started," Byrnes said. "I said, 'Michael Taylor? Of the A's? Wait a minute, you've got to be kidding me. I can't believe you withheld this information.' The next thing I said was, 'Why isn't he working on my show?' "

News to Beane

At a KNBR-sponsored event last week with A's general manager Billy Beane and other local sports executives, Violet Kennedy mentioned to Beane that Taylor was interning for the station. Beane's response: "Wait, what? What are you talking about? He's really on the air?"

Violet Kennedy laughed and added, "The important part for Billy to know is that Michael is working out before he gets here and after he leaves."

Taylor, who lives in San Mateo, has an 8 a.m. workout session with a trainer before he heads for the station, and when he gets home, he works out on his own, and he'll resume baseball activity in the next few weeks. A Type-1 diabetic, Taylor already is accustomed to a strict routine, but the KNBR job helps keep him going to bed at an early hour and eating right.

Taylor's duties at KNBR include a regular man-on-the-street style segment called "What's Bugging You?," which airs at 1:15 p.m. weekdays on the "Fitz and Brooks" show.

Stepping up to the mike

Taylor quickly found that wielding a microphone is wildly different than being on the other side of one, especially when approaching strangers for comments. He knows that, at 6-foot-6, he can appear a little intimidating, and, he said with a smile, "I try to make people comfortable. I'm not going to wear a hoodie. I dress neutrally."

Taylor figures he has about a 30 percent success rate getting comments, but that hasn't daunted him. He can be found late mornings around Fourth Street near Market and Mission, patiently making his pitch.

"People say no a lot of different ways, from a nice 'No, thank you,' to no words at all, to 'Get a job,' " Taylor said. "If someone doesn't want to speak, I stay positive."

"It's very difficult. If I had a booth people could stop by, it would be easier, but sometimes people recognize KNBR on the microphone. And other people get freaked out."

Taylor has learned to cut and edit his sound, and he recently edited a replay of the Giants' World Series victory, something that might make A's fans cringe, but Taylor is simply pleased to be picking up some skills in a new field. And the Giants' flagship station is enjoying having an A's player around.

"I've never said this to Michael, but it's an honor that he wants to do this with us," afternoon host Rod Brooks said. "He wants to spend his free time here? That's awesome."

Doing the dirty work

"Michael is doing great," co-host Bob Fitzgerald said. "He doesn't have any stage fright, he's himself on the air, and he's as much a smart-ass as Rod and I are, so he jumps right in. He's a pro athlete, wading out there into the public, editing his own tape. He's willing to do all the dirty work. It's amazing. It's really refreshing."

Violet Kennedy said that though KNBR has had some college athletes intern at the station, Taylor is its first pro athlete. She'd welcome more.

"Michael came in and has been just great, and he understands what a good opportunity it is if he eventually wants to go on and have a career in this business," Violet Kennedy said. "Right now, if you're an NBA player, why wouldn't you want to be here?"

"What Michael is doing is brilliant," Byrnes said. "He's got an advantage; he's already doing advanced work. Why not educate yourself and see what else is out there? It's so smart. He's got a foot in the door."