

Correa keeps family No. 1

Driven by love for the game and support from home, the 2012 top draft pick is embarking on promising baseball career

There was a time when baseball teams did not want Carlos Correa.

In the youth leagues of Puerto Rico, Carlos was an unknown quantity as a five-year-old who began playing because of his father's own love for baseball.

The elder Carlos Correa eventually found a team willing to take his son, Carlos, who impressed the rest of the league so much with his home run power that the next season every team wanted the younger Carlos on its roster.

But the elder Carlos insisted that his son remain loyal to the team that gave him his first chance.

"All the teams wanted me, and my dad said, 'No, you've got to stay with your team that first wanted you there,'" the younger Carlos said.

The elder Carlos reflected that loyalty by coaching his son daily, even after 12-hour – or more – work days as a construction handyman at multiple jobs. The father and son would practice baseball in the evenings, and when the government gave the elder Carlos the task of caring for a baseball park, he had a perfect place to practice with his eldest son all the way into his high school years.

"He worked in the morning and the afternoon, and then at night he was with me at the ballpark, so he put in a lot of sacrifice and gave his best for me," the younger Carlos said. "It was pretty amazing."

The support of his parents and family has been critical for Correa, who, at 18 years old, is on a journey no one in his family has experienced – a professional baseball career – in addition to a first-time distinction for someone born in his native country: being the No. 1 overall pick in the annual Major League Draft.

Growing up in Santa Isabel along the south coast of Puerto Rico, Correa followed the major leagues closely, including Puerto Rican players like Hall of Famer Roberto Alomar and All-Stars Ivan Rodriguez, Carlos Delgado, Carlos Beltran, and Santa Isabel native Benito Santiago.

"It's like an inspiration for you to know that those players from the island are there, playing baseball in the big leagues," Correa said. "It gives you inspiration to work hard and be there too."

From an early age, Correa, with the help of his family, dedicated himself to playing baseball.

"I knew that I loved it; I knew that I wanted to play that sport," Correa said. "Thank God who gave me the ability to play the game, and I took advantage of it."

At 12 years old, he entered a more competitive league outside his hometown. Once he was old enough, he played baseball during each of the three seasons that make up year-round baseball in Puerto Rico and was on multiple championship teams.

Correa went on to study and play at the Puerto Rico Baseball Academy and High School, which develops young players academically and athletically for playing college and professional baseball in the United States.

Correa proved himself as the eventual valedictorian of his graduating class, and as his baseball skills improved at the Academy, the possibility of a professional career began to crystallize. In his final year of school leading up to the draft, he came in contact with more current and former major leaguers.

"I started meeting more people – players from the big leagues – giving me advice," Correa said.

Correa fielded multiple scholarship offers and had committed to the University of Miami before the Houston Astros drafted him last June as the No. 1 overall pick. It was the highest selection ever of a Puerto Rican-born player, topping the No. 17 overall selection (also by Houston) of Ramon Castro, who played for the Quad City River Bandits in the Astros system in 1996 on the way to a 13-year major league career.

The excitement around the start of Correa's career reaches from Puerto Rico, where fans ask for pictures when his family goes out to eat, to Houston, where he was introduced to fans at Minute Maid Park just a few days after being drafted, and now to the Quad Cities.

"I do my best...to show (the fans) how glad I am," said Correa, who appeared in four major league spring training games with the Astros in March. "You've got to show them how glad you are that they're there for you, and how exciting it is to have fans that come into the ballpark to see you play."

Correa, who turned 18 following his first season in the Astros organization, is beginning his first full season of Minor League Baseball with the Quad Cities River Bandits. The Midwest League franchise last had a No. 1 overall pick on the roster when Joe Mauer played for the Minnesota Twins

affiliate in 2002.

Correa's baseball path has changed the lives of his entire family – his parents, Carlos and Sandybel, his 14-year-old brother, Jean Carlos, and his four-year-old sister, Leibysand. They are not used to having the younger Carlos playing baseball away from home, but Correa still talks with them on the phone every day, and continues to credit them for his success.

“I think that support of my family and my parents was really important for me,” said Correa, who appreciates the sacrifices that began with his father coaching him as a youth. “I feel happy for (my father) and for my family, too.”