

# It's a bat trade

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The Laredo Broncos traded 10 maple bats for pitcher John Odom in an unusual trade made public Friday involving the Calgary Vipers of the Golden Baseball League.

It was either that or 10 bottles of tequila from Nuevo Laredo.

“It’s a unique story,” Broncos Manager Dan Shwam said. “But we came to the conclusion that the bats would be fine because, apparently, they don’t have maple wood up in Calgary. Those are the bats they wanted and preferred, and they had a pitcher we wanted.”

General Manager Jose Melendez said it would have been an even better deal, moneywise, if the Vipers had accepted the tequila because it’s cheaper than the bats, but it all worked in the end.

“In independent ball, this is just what happens,” Melendez said. “Let’s say we needed baseballs. I would ask for baseballs instead of it coming out of my expense, and in turn, I’d give them a player that we might not have had any plans for.”

For his part, Odom took it all in stride.

“No reason to be offended at all,” he said. “I just want to make Jose look like a genius on all of this. It’s funny, good publicity and hopefully it gets people interested in the Broncos.”

Both Shwam and Melendez have high hopes for their new player.

The 6-2, 185-pound Odom, who was selected by the San Francisco Giants in the 44th round of the 2003 amateur entry draft, was supposed to be acquired for the one of the Broncos’ best hitters, but when the hitter balked at going to Canada, the two teams found another avenue to get the deal done.

Talks had been going on for about two weeks, though the Broncos had shown interest in Odom as early as February.

After the hitter rejected the deal, the Broncos offered cash in exchange for Odom. The offer was labeled an “insult” by the Vipers, but the offer of something tangible — the bats — was acceptable.

“I had driven all the way down here, thinking I was going to be traded and then I found out a player had jumped ship,” said Odom, who has been in Laredo the past four days.

“I was upset, and then I was sitting in Jose’s office when he told me, ‘We traded you for 10 bats.’ I was like, ‘Cool, whatever. I hope it’s good wood.’

“It’s whatever. It’s been a long time since I’ve been on the field, because of injuries,” Odom added. “I just wanted to play.”

Odom sat out 2007 due to a dislocation in his non-throwing arm suffered in spring training last year. He noted Friday that he is back at full health and ready to get back on the mound.

According to an AP report, the Vipers requested 34-inch, black C243 Prairie Sticks, double-dipped, for the trade. According to the Prairie Sticks Web site, their maple bats retail for \$69 apiece, discounted to \$65.50 for purchases of six to 11 bats.

Teams and players prefer maple bats because they are stronger, last longer and make for more solid contact on the ball.

“I’ve been wanting to get this guy over here,” Melendez said of Odom, whom the Broncos intend to place in the starting rotation. “They (Calgary) didn’t want any player from us because it’s too expensive to fly anyone from here to there.

The transaction, which was conducted Tuesday, first appeared on The Associated Press sports wire on Thursday night. It became a primary storyline Friday on ESPN.com, SportsCenter, Fox Sports News, CNNSI.com and even yahoo.com.

According to the AP report, the Vipers had signed Odom a month ago, but because Odom claimed a “minor,” but unspecified, criminal record that he did not reveal to immigration officials before they scanned his passport, he was not allowed to go to Canada.

According to the report, Odom said the charge stemmed from a fight he was in when he was 17. Although he thought it had been expunged from his record, it popped up during immigration.

“He had troubles when he was younger,” Melendez said. “For little reasons that happened long ago, he wasn’t allowed into Canada.”

The Broncos will activate Odom on Monday, and if all goes well, he will start sometime during their first homestead next weekend.

As for Odom, the recent surge in publicity has only given him more motivation.

“Maybe when I make the major leagues, I’ll look back and joke, ‘Man, remember when a team traded me for 10 bats?’ ”

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