

# Daniel Nava hits grand slam in debut

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When Daniel Nava hit the first pitch he saw as a big leaguer for a grand slam Saturday, he punctuated an improbable journey to the majors for the one-time Santa Clara University team manager — and newest Red Sox folk hero.

"It's ridiculous," Nava said of his career path when asked by reporters in Boston following the Red Sox's 10-2 win over Philadelphia.

Nava, 27, is anything but an overnight sensation. He was a 70-pound freshman at St. Francis High, and even as a senior didn't always hit for himself. He was cut after trying out at Santa Clara, then spent two seasons as the team manager, doing the team's laundry and plotting a career as a coach.

**But a growth spurt late in his teens changed Nava's life. He became an All-American at the College of San Mateo, then returned to Santa Clara and won the West Coast Conference batting title in 2006.**

Nava's career appeared to stall again after he was not drafted because of questions about his size. He joined the Chico Outlaws of the Golden Baseball League initially as a fill-in player. He won league MVP honors, was named the No. 1 independent league prospect by Baseball America and drew the attention of the Red Sox.

The Red Sox bought Nava's contract for \$1 with the understanding they would pay the Outlaws an additional \$1,499 if Nava was good enough to make it to minor league spring training, according to a Boston radio station.

The switch-hitter, now listed at 5-foot-10 and 200 pounds, has been making believers ever since.

He won the California League batting title for the Lancaster JetHawks in 2008 — his third batting title in three years at three levels — and then batted a combined .352 at two levels last season. Nava was batting .294 with eight homers at Triple-A Pawtucket when he was called up Saturday to start in left field and bat ninth.

With his parents in the stands at Fenway Park and the Red Sox trailing 2-1 in the second inning, Nava blasted a fastball from Joe Blanton into Boston's bullpen in right-center field. He became the second major leaguer to hit a grand slam on the first pitch of his career (Kevin Kouzmanoff, now with the A's, did it for Cleveland in 2006).

As Nava rounded second, it began to hit him. He "started to scream. I was pumped."

When Nava came up the next inning, the bases again were loaded. But with the crowd on its feet, he struck out on a check swing. He later hit a line-drive double into the left-center gap and finished 2 for 4.

"He's hit everywhere he's been," Red Sox manager Terry Francona told [MLB.com](http://mlb.com). "There's been a lot of people in player development that have been talking about this kid for the last little while, saying, he can help you win games. So he's going to get a chance."

Nava told [MLB.com](http://mlb.com): "It's obviously a dream come true. I was telling my friends, 'Sorry guys if I don't know what to say, because I'm kind of speechless, the whole thing happened so fast.' I'm trying to learn what to do, where to go.

"It's been a fun run, that's for sure."

## NOTES:

*--Ex-Bulldogs are at home in New England: Nava is the second former CSM player (2005 All-America) to fill a starting void in Boston this year. Former (2005) CSM football QB Julian Edelman started for New England at slotback.*

*--Remember that Jon Miller -- who got his start broadcasting CSM baseball games on KCSM -- will be inducted into Baseball's Hall of Fame this year...*