

# Jed Lowrie returns to a familiar place

By Alex Speier, WEEL.com

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It may have seemed like Jed Lowrie was playing out of his mind during the Red Sox' homestand at Fenway Park, having a sort of once-in-a-lifetime, out-of-body run of brilliance at the plate.

He wasn't.

Lowrie had similar runs before, and therein lies the intrigue of what he is currently doing. Granted, the seven-game hitting streak that occurred during the Sox homestand, in which Lowrie was 15-for-24 (.625), unquestionably represented his best run at the major league level, and so it would be difficult to argue the point that it was the best run he's ever been on given the talent of his opponents.

All the same, there was precedent for Lowrie to go on a tear along these lines, something that the shortstop noted when asked – after going 4-for-5 on Monday – whether he had ever experienced anything along the lines of this stretch.

“Yeah, sure,” he said. “I hit .400 in college. I hit .300 in the minor leagues. It's a hot streak, one that you continue to work and extend as long as possible.”

In fact, the Sox' series in Oakland offers a reminder of the basis for such claims. A bit more than 20 miles from the home of the A's, Lowrie established himself as one of the top college performers in the country at Stanford. To those who saw him in college, the idea of Lowrie emerging as a lineup force is not surprising.

“It's nice to see that Jed is performing like we all know he can perform,” said Stanford coach Mark Marquess. “He's one of the best players we've ever had at Stanford.”

There, he had runs that rival what he's been doing for the Red Sox in recent days.

“He won Pac-10 Player of the Year. He had to do something right,” said outfielder Jacoby Ellsbury, a Pac-10 rival of Oregon State before both were drafted by the Sox in 2005. “[Lowrie's current streak] might surprise a lot of other people, but it doesn't surprise me. Obviously he's seeing the ball really well and putting great swings on it, but it's nothing I haven't seen him do in the past. He's real hot right now, putting up good ABs, having quality at-bats. Anytime you do that, you're bound to get hot, and he's really hot.”

In 2004, Lowrie was – as Ellsbury suggested – Pac-10 Player of the Year while winning the conference Triple Crown winner as a sophomore, hitting .399 (his average fell below .400 on the last day of the season) with 17 homers and 68 RBI. He had a .505 OBP and .734 slugging mark.

That season, he once homered in four consecutive games. He had two separate 11-game hitting streaks that year during which he hit an even .500. He had a game where he was 6-for-6 with a walk.

Lowrie sustained ridiculous runs of success against elite college pitching. It was for that reason that the Sox identified him as the player whom they wanted with one of their five first- or sandwich round picks in 2005.

The team had elected to roll the dice on some high-risk, high-reward players, and so after tabbing Clay Buchholz (a pitcher of enormous potential but who had off-the-field questions) with their third pick that year, the team wanted Lowrie – viewed as a very safe bet to make a contribution at the big league level in some capacity, with a good possibility of emerging as a big league regular – with its next selection.

Lowrie quickly rewarded that faith with outstanding performance in the minors. Though his numbers took a hit in 2006 as he struggled with an ankle injury while in High-A Wilmington, he emerged as a standout prospect in 2007. Between Double-A Portland and Triple-A Pawtucket, he hit .298 with a .393 OBP, .503 slugging mark and .896 OPS. The 23-year-old had an eye-opening 68 extra-base hits (47 doubles, 8 triples, 13 homers) in 133 games.

Multiple Sox officials noted, even when Lowrie was limited by injuries, that his minor league performance could be help up against that of other elite prospects, comparing favorably even to that of Dustin Pedroia.

“Jed can hit. He's always been able to hit,” Sox first base coach Ron Johnson, who managed Lowrie in 2007 and 2008 with Pawtucket, recalled. “I do remember in that '07 season, he was very, very good, and he had power from both sides of the plate.”

Clearly, Lowrie is not going to end up hitting .500 this year. Whether he remains the Sox' everyday shortstop is an open question. Just as quickly as he got hot, he could fade, a notion that received some credence in Oakland on Tuesday, where Lowrie went 0-for-4 with two strikeouts.

That caveat noted, it is important to note that, as good as Lowrie has been, the eruption has not been a bolt from the blue. His amateur and

minor league careers suggest as much. So, too, does his performance in the majors since he recovered from mono and joined the Sox last July.

Entering last night, Lowrie had played 66 games over the last two years. Among big league middle infielders who have batted at least 200 times since the start of last year, Lowrie ranked first in average (.322), first in OBP (.404), second in slugging (.564) and second in OPS (.969). Only Troy Tulowitzki has been a more impactful middle-of-the-diamond offensive contributor than Lowrie since last year's All-Star break.

All of that would suggest that Lowrie has earned an everyday role. But while he says frequently that he envisions himself as an everyday shortstop in the majors, he did not dwell on whether or when that opportunity might come.

"I don't really think about that," Lowrie said on Monday. "I know I say it a lot, but I just come to the park and prepare myself to play everyday. It might get redundant, but that's because it's what I do."

In that sense, too, Lowrie is the same person that he was in college. In his Stanford bio (which features a picture of Lowrie that makes him look like he's in Little League), he offered the following advice for young players: "Never give up on your dreams and don't worry what others are doing; stay focused on what you need to do to make yourself a better player."

Apparently, Lowrie heeded his own counsel, and in so doing, he has reached a point where he has been able to display the ability that has been evident at every other level of his baseball career as well.