

# Brien Taylor Unmade: An oral history

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*Baseball's amateur draft is a risky bet to begin with -- only about 17 percent of signed draft picks ever make it to the majors. But high school pitchers are the riskiest bet of all. That, plus the suddenness of his rise and fall, may be what sealed the legend of Brien Taylor.*

*Taylor, a shy, 6-foot-3 kid from a double-wide trailer in coastal Beaufort, N.C., was the last high school pitcher selected No. 1 overall in baseball's draft. The [New York Yankees](#) -- yes, they held the first pick in June 1991 -- had visions of a left-handed [Pedro Martinez](#) or maybe a harder-throwing [Randy Johnson](#).*

*Taylor never ended up joining his one-time spring training roommate [Derek Jeter](#) on the Yankees' dynasty teams. Still, some believe he was the greatest pitching prospect in the history of the draft.*

*As baseball prepares for Thursday's first round -- in which high school pitcher Brady Aiken could be taken with the No. 1 overall pick -- this is the story of Brien Taylor, Scott Boras, the Yankees and the 1991 draft.*

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## THE BEST AMATEUR PITCHER EVER

### **Brian Cashman, Yankees assistant farm director in 1991**

"Bill Livesey is one of the greatest scouts of our era. He told me the best amateur position player he ever saw was A-Rod (Alex Rodriguez). The best amateur pitcher he ever saw was Brien Taylor."

### **Gene "Stick" Michael, Yankees general manager in 1991**

"His arm slot was exactly like Randy Johnson's, not sidearm but very low three-quarters. They had the same exact arm slot, only Brien Taylor threw a little bit harder."

### **Scott Boras, Taylor's adviser**

"I remember Brien threw a pitch in a high school game. It started in and moved out and it still stayed in the strike zone. The catcher completely missed it and the umpire called it strike three and appropriately so. He was a true phenom.

"I've seen the talent now in 35 drafts. Every year, I watch and I have never seen someone like him."

## **Bill Livesey, Yankees scouting director in 1991**

"He had everything you are looking for -- size, strength, athleticism, body type, loose, live arm, the ability to spin the ball. I think the high school game I was at, he topped out at 98 [mph]. It could've been 88, the ease at which he threw. You couldn't tell how hard he was throwing, he threw so easily with so little effort. He was the total package."

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## **FINDING BRIEN TAYLOR**

### **Livesey**

"We had a meeting at a hotel in Arizona in January of 1991. We brought in all of our cross-checkers. Outfielder Mike Kelly was a great outfielder at Arizona State at the time. We just told our guys, 'This is the top college player in the country. Your job this year is to find somebody better. If we don't, Kelly will be our pick.'"

### **Boras**

"I first heard about Brien when he was a junior in high school in 1990. I went down and I watched him pitch. He just had an electric arm. A lot of kids in high school throw hard, maybe 92-93. At that time, he was throwing right around that, but the key thing about Brien was the late movement of his ball. He threw downhill. It got to the plate and it just exploded.

"I watched him pitch one game and then I watched him pitch another. I began the process of talking to his mother, Betty, who was a delightful lady. She worked at a seafood operation where she cracked crab. She removed the crab meat from the crab shells. Mr. Taylor was a bricklayer. He had the hands of a bricklayer, a big, strong man.

"So she invited me to come to their house and talk to Brien. I remember the road to their home. They had a double-wide trailer. I went there in the middle of the summer. It was really hot and humid. There was no air-conditioning. There was a single light source, a wire that hung down from the roof with a light bulb."

### **Livesey**

"In February of 1991, our North Carolina scout, Jeff Taylor, called and said, 'I'm following up on our conversation in Arizona.' I said, 'Whattya got?' He said, 'I've got a left-handed pitcher in North Carolina.' Wow, he started to rave about him."

## **Joe McIlvaine, San Diego Padres GM in 1991 (San Diego had the No. 8 pick)**

"There are two things you can't teach in a pitcher. One is size. You can't make a kid 6-foot-3. Another thing is arm strength. You can't create arm strength. The other things -- the curveball, the delivery, the changeup -- you can improve upon. But you can't teach size and arm strength. That's the given. That is what Brien Taylor had. He had size and arm strength."