

Mills Making The Adjustments

Written by {ga=consigliere}

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The Indians surprised a lot of people a month back when they selected slugger Beau Mills with their first round pick in the June amateur draft. Mills came from a small school, and some question whether or not he will be able to play a position defensively at the big league level. Mills is now playing in Eastlake with the Lake County Captains, and our Tony Lastoria had a chance to sit down and chat with him in a recent visit there.



The Indians selected third baseman Beau Mills with their first pick in the 2007 Draft this past June. Mills was eager to sign quickly, and upon signing started his professional career in Mahoning Valley.

Since then, however, Mills has had to endure what seems like a myriad of adjustments. One of those adjustments was the change from college ball to professional ball.

“I’m trying to make the adjustment right now,” says Mills. “I think is about getting familiar with the surroundings being in pro ball and being a part of an organization now. The speed of the game is a little different here in professional baseball. And it is just getting to know myself playing day in and day out everyday where you learn new things about your body and learn to listen to it. Pitch to pitch adjustments. It’s a lot different in college ball where you can go up there and try your hardest that at bat. You have to do your hardest pitch to pitch here, and take every pitch seriously like it’s your last one.”

One of the big adjustments for a lot of players coming out of college is not only the transition from college to professional baseball, but also from aluminum bats to wood bats. However, for Mills, he already is quite fond of wood bats and has played with them mostly in his career.

“Yeah, I’ve played summer ball three to four with a wooden bat,” says

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Mills. "There is an adjustment, about two weeks. It is more of finding about yourself day to day and the pitch to pitch adjustments more than metal and wood. That takes care of itself, and I'm pretty much over that."

Okay, so as far as adjusting from college to professional ball and from aluminum to wood bats, Mills seems to be on top of things. When the Indians drafted him they immediately made plans to move him from third base to first base. So, what about the adjustment to a new position?

"I think it is kind of nice (learning first base)," says Mills. "I get to learn about a new side of the field, and learn new things about this game. I'm just here for the organization, and what they want me to do I'm going to do. It has made it a little more difficult trying to learn a whole new position right at the beginning of my pro career, but that's what I am going to do, and I don't have a problem with it. Before coming here, I've only ever played third, and never played first base before."

For a lot of fans, learning to play first base may seem like an easy task since many consider it the least important defensive position on the field, and easiest to play. Nonetheless, it is still a challenging position to learn when you have never played there before, especially with positioning on cutoff throws from the outfield. Overall, Mills has done a good job adapting to the new position.

"I think it is coming naturally," says Mills. "It is coming good. There are some things I need to learn. There's a lot more of the mechanical part of it I need to learn. Being around the game a whole lot I kind of learned the standing position and seeing where you need to be on certain balls, but there's a lot more that goes into first base than somebody thinks that has or has not played the game before. It is a lot more than just catching the ball."

Oh, and what about the weather? Certainly, for a California native, there has to be an adjustment with playing in the humid summer conditions out East, right?

"A little bit, but not much," explains Mills. "I played in the Cape Cod League, so I've come back here (before). Of course my dad is a coach for Boston, so I have been back East plenty of times in my life. There's a little adjustment with the humidity. It's nice when you have this wind,

but whenever it is humid out it takes a lot out of you. Especially when you play

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day to day."

When Mills was drafted, one of the main reasons the Indians initially focused on moving him to first base from third base was because of a shoulder injury he suffered a few years ago which could present problems with his throwing and keeping on the field healthy. The shoulder injury may raise a red flag with Indians fans, but according to Mills he thinks rest this offseason will be the cure.

"Yeah, it is an impingement in my arm," said Mills. "It was inflammation in my shoulder that caused an impingement in a nerve. It just takes some time to heal. I have never had surgery, and never going to need surgery right now for that, but I think especially being in pro ball now it is going to be nice where I am going to get three to four months off of playing which is going to really help with the inflammation and let it go down. And then after it fully goes down in the offseason, to be able to rebuild it back up and strengthen it I think there will be no problem by next year."

Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins recently commented how the organization has not given up on Mills at third base, and how they like his athleticism and agility at the position. So much so, the plan of installing him at first base full time has been put on hold. The left-handed hitting Mills still mostly plays third base, and only really plays first base to give him a night off when his arm is sore. The organization wants to see him play the position before abandoning it and moving him to first base full time.

Mills acknowledges that he just may stick at third base, which is a position he certainly is more comfortable playing.

"They saw me play at third, and they really like me over there and say I fit better over there," says Mills. "So that's what we are going to try and do. We are going to try and work through this impingement, and maybe I fit over there. It gets sore real easily. And sometimes there is pain, but when it does I go to first or I DH and then it goes away by the next day. I think I am fine and 100% and ready to go."

Mills is part of a baseball family, as his father Brad Mills was drafted and played for the Montreal Expos, and after blowing out his knee he went into coaching and has been doing that ever since. He has spent the last 11 years as a coach in the majors, four with the Boston Red Sox. In all, he has spent over 25 years in

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professional baseball. With the Red Sox on their break for the All-Star game, the senior Mills ventured over to Eastlake, Ohio to watch his son play at Classic Park and spend some time with him.

"It was awesome having my father around," says Mills. "I took some walks with him, and spent a lot of time with him. He talked to me and wanted to know what was going on with me and I kind of opened up. It was nice having a guy there, especially my father who has been through this all. He has been through everything I am going through and able to guide me along and help me out."

And, yet, this brings to light yet another adjustment for Mills, which is dealing with the family sacrifices you make as a professional baseball player where for pretty much eight months of the year you are away from them. Mills lived through this with his father growing up, and is now experiencing it for the first time himself as a player.

"Growing up around the game for 20 years you get a lot of memories," recalls Mills. "It was real hard having my dad away, and I think that's always kind of prepared me to be able to do this. It maybe makes the transition a little easier because my dad has always been gone for eight months out of the year out of my whole life, and now me leaving my family for eight months has kind of made it a little bit easier understanding what I am getting myself into. Being around the professional baseball clubhouse and knowing how to act and how to walk day to day as a professional is kind of the biggest thing I have taken out of it."

Still, the biggest adjustment is the daily grind. In college, you play 60-70 games at most, and have several off days. In professional baseball, you are lucky to get one day off a week, which in minor league baseball is usually used as a travel day on the bus.

"You take it day by day," says Mills. "I think I am a little fatigued, but not much as much as I think everybody else is. I think you are basically going to find you get over it and try to dig down within and find a certain place that when you come out and when you step out on that field between the lines it is go time no matter what day it is and no matter how you feel you are a professional and that's what you gotta be. You gotta play when you are inbetween the lines and leave everything else aside."

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"You hear a lot of things about the day in and day out grind," continues Mills. "People tell you that you don't know because you never have experienced it. Once you walk through it you feel your body going through it. And I think that the biggest thing is that day to day coming out every day and having to prepare yourself everyday. You can't take a day off unless it is an off day. That's the big thing is if you take a day off it could set you back for a long time. That's something I have curved my whole life and now it is finally something that when I experience it head on it is really tough but I can deal with it."

Being a third baseman, when asked if he had a favorite player growing up, Mills was not quick to offer up any particular player. He did mention that as an 11-year old he met up with Scott Rolen, and was so impressed with how much of a great guy and person he was on and off the field that he always watched him since and tried to pattern himself after him.

Maybe an 11-year kid in Lake County who gets a chance to meet Mills will feel the same way someday as well.