

Mulhern Lost In The Shuffle

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Friday, August 17 2007 7:00 PM -

The Indians organization is loaded with first basemen, from the lowest levels of the minors, all the way up to Ryan Garko with the big league squad. The one player who is kind of getting lost in the shuffle is Buffalo's Ryan Mulhern, who is hitting .305 with 15 HR and 72 RBI for the Bisons. Ryan is clearly ready to play at the major league level, yet there is no spot for him. And our Tony Lastoria had a chance to talk to him about it this week.



The Cleveland Indians organization is loaded with good first baseman from the major league level all the way down to the low levels of the minor leagues.

At the major league level you have Ryan Garko who is having a nice season in Cleveland, and you also have Travis Hafner and Victor Martinez who occasionally fill in at the position. You have Michael Aubrey and Jordan Brown in Akron, where Brown will get strong consideration for Eastern League MVP.

In Kinston, you have the red hot Matt Whitney who arguably is the MVP of the entire Indians system this year.

Then in Lake County, you have high profile 2007 first round pick Beau Mills playing some first base, and over in Mahoning Valley you have Todd Martin who is running away with the MVP of the NY-Penn League.

If you are an astute follower of the minor leagues and the Indians farm system, you would notice that I neglected to list Ryan Mulhern in that list of first baseman above. The omission was on purpose, as this is usually what happens to him.

With all those high profile, MVP players up and down the system, as well as the numerous quality options at the major league level, it is easy to forget about the Buffalo first baseman.

Mulhern, 26, is a player who is stuck in a sort of purgatory in the Indians system. It has not happened yet as this is his first year in Buffalo, but if he sticks in this organization after this season and is not traded or lost in the Rule 5 Draft, he'll be right back in Buffalo again.

He arguably is good enough to play right now at the major league level, but as long as Garko et al are in Cleveland, Mulhern will never get a shot in Cleveland.

Mulhern has arguably reached his ceiling in the organization at Triple-A with no chance to advance any higher in the foreseeable future, and day by day the floor below him continues to rise as the high profile players below him continue to shine and gain ground on him.

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Mulhern says he does not think about it, but you can tell he is aware of the situation. "I don't think about a lot of that stuff," said Mulhern.

"The only thing I can control is going and playing and it sets up everything.

It is hard because you lose your focus if you think about that, so I try to think about here (Buffalo)."

Baseball America's Chris Kline likes Mulhern's power, but notes the logjam at the position in the system.

"Just big power to all fields," said Kline. "There is such a logjam on the corners in the organization, but he's really proven himself after coming seemingly out of nowhere a couple years ago. It's one thing to see a guy make those kind of adjustments in the Carolina League or the Eastern League, but to do it at the Triple-A level certainly is impressive."

Going out and playing certainly helps. Mulhern is having a very good season in Buffalo, in fact he might be the Bisons MVP, and is hitting .305 with 15 HR, 72 RBI and an .863 OPS.

His .305 average ranks seventh in the International League, and he is also ranked fifth in RBI (72), third in doubles (34), seventh in slugging percentage (.500), and eighth in OPS (.863).

Mulhern has come back this season refreshed after a rough year in 2006. After winning the Lou Boudreau award as the organization's top hitter in 2005 when he combined to hit .315 with 32 HR and 94 RBI in only 403 combined at bats in Kinston and Akron, Mulhern struggled in Akron in 2006 when he hit .268 with 15 HR and 69 RBI in 452 at bats.



According to former Indians Farm Director John Farrell, much of his problem in 2006 was a lack of aggressiveness early in the count in not attacking fastballs, and then late in the count being over-aggressive when the pitchers were throwing more breaking balls. He tended to over-think his at bats and just did not have a good plan of attack when he stepped into the batters box. While Mulhern does not deny those issues above hampered him throughout 2006, Mulhern feels most of his struggles last year were a byproduct of being tired from playing winter ball between the 2005 and 2006 season.

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"Going into last year, I was shot because I played winter ball," recalled Mulhern. "I was tired.

Everything caught up with me.

It was a nice offseason [this past year] to relax and I was rejuvenated mentally."

The jump from Double-A to Triple-A is hard for any player, but for Mulhern so far he appears to be handling it well. One of the biggest differences between Double-A and Triple-A that Mulhern has noticed right away is the pitching.

"You are facing better pitchers consistently," said Mulhern. "A lot of them all have big league experience and have been up and down a lot of the time, so you are seeing one guy on ESPN one night and then the next series you are seeing him against you.

Or, you face a guy and then he gets called up."

While Mulhern has very good raw power and hits a lot of doubles, one of the biggest knocks on him is his plate discipline as he strikes out a lot. For a power hitter such as Mulhern, strikeouts are to be expected, but he does not draw a lot of walks.

This year, he has struckout 119 times already in 426 at bats for a 3.5:1 at bat to strikeout ratio, and has only walked 35 times for a 3.4:1 strikeout to walk ratio.

These ratios are right in line with his season-by-season and career numbers, so going by the numbers it looks as if improvement is not being made in this area.

Plus, being 26-years old, he is past the point where plate discipline can really be changed much.

That said, Mulhern knows full well what he needs to work on to become a better player and increase his chances at making the big leagues. Working on his plate discipline is what he is working on the most as a hitter right now.

"It is just pitch selection," noted Mulhern. "Trying to not go outside of the zone as much and cut down on strikeouts and get the walks up.

I go up there hacking, so I am going to strikeout a lot.

I feel a lot of times I am swinging outside the zone and getting myself out.

So I am trying to zero in on it and work on things like that."

The Indians have several minor league coordinators who bounce around and visit each affiliate throughout the season. They assist players in improving in areas where they have deficiencies or are having problems, whether it be at the plate, on the mound, or in the field.

The Indians hitting coordinators Dave Hudgens and Bruce Fields often give feedback to players and work with them to try and suggest improvements when necessary.

"When Hudgens comes to town, or Bruce Fields comes in town, they always talk to us about that stuff," said Mulhern. "We work on different things at the plate and we'll tell them how we are feeling or give our thoughts on things. They

will give us their philosophies or things from guys they have worked with or what other big leaguers have said.

You take what you can from them and see what works for you."

