

Drennen Still Has Room For Growth

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Thursday, September 20 2007 7:00 PM -

John Drennen was one of the Indians first round picks in the 2005 Draft out of Rancho Bernardo High School in San Diego, a high school notorious for pumping out talented young players. Some Tribe fans know him as the guy that took Roger Clemens deep in a rehab start for him last summer. Drennen is just 21 years of age, and had a pretty good season in Kinston. And our Tony Lastoria had a chance to talk to him when down there a couple weeks back.



To Kinston Indians outfielder John Drennen, his teammates and coaches are a "bunch of good dudes."

Yes, this is John Drennen. Drennen is a young man born and raised on the West Coast where movie stars shine and surfing rules. He likes to have fun, and most of all, play baseball.

Drennen was the Indians supplemental first round pick in the 2005 Draft out of Rancho Bernardo High School in San Diego, a high school notorious for pumping out talented young players. He was born in Hawaii and has basically lived in California since the age of five. Living on the West Coast his entire life, his only experience on the East Coast prior to being drafted was when he went on baseball trips with his travel team.

Most Indians fans that know who Drennen is know him because he is 'that A-baller who hit a home run off of Roger Clemens.' Yes, that is true, as Drennen did hit a tape measure shot off of Clemens last summer.

However, while that was a great moment for Drennen, he has much bigger aspirations than simply being some random minor league kid who took The Rocket deep.

"It is something that you obviously are going to remember," said Drennen. "It was great to

face him, but hopefully I get a chance to see other guys up there [in the majors]."

After the Indians drafted Drennen, they knew he had a scholarship in hand to attend and play at UCLA, so the Indians acted quickly and signed Drennen for \$1 million and sent him to rookie-level Burlington. In his professional debut at Burlington in 2005, Drennen hit .238 with 8 HR, 29 RBI and a .760 OPS in 51 games.

He followed that up last year with a very good campaign in Lake County where he hit .321 with 6 HR, 30 RBI and an .880 OPS in 67 games, but when promoted to Kinston mid-season his numbers dipped there as he was overmatched and wore down some and hit only .239 with 0 HR, 6 RBI and a .656 OPS

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in 31 games.

The Indians selected Drennen because they loved his advanced bat and polished approach to hitting. Although he is somewhat undersized, he packs a lot of punch with his smooth swing and has good pop and a dynamite bat. Right now, he is more a gap hitter, but as he matures he is expected to develop more power.

He is one of those hardworking, energy-type players with a motor that does not stop, and he is very aggressive at the plate, on the bases and in the field.

One national league scout I talked to likes what he has seen in Drennen and noted, "How many kids his age are in this league? He is going to get stronger as he matures and he has a good bat. The ball jumps off his bat and he could be a good left fielder."

Yes, Drennen is still very young as he just turned 21-years old the last weekend of August. In his return trip to Kinston this year, Drennen fared much better as he hit .254 with 13 HR, 77 RBI and a .727 OPS in 131 games.

Of note, he hit right-handers very well where he hit .292 with 11 HR, 65 RBI and an .820 OPS in 359 at bats.

But, he really struggled against left-handers as he only hit .153 with 2 HR, 12 RBI and a .481 OPS in 137 at bats.

Still, overall, Drennen was pretty satisfied with his season, even though he knows there is much room for improvement.

"It had its ups and downs, and that's what it is all about," said Drennen. "Just learning about yourself and [knowing] you are going to have your struggles.

It's about going out there and having fun and getting your work in and continuing to learn.

I feel that I had a good year.

Statistically with the [batting] average, it is not where I want it to be but it is what it is."

With a second full season in the books, and having to return to Kinston for the entire year, Drennen did learn a lot this year and has calmed himself down more at the plate.

"It was basically about trying to get up to having a solid approach at the plate and sticking with it," said Drennen. "Not jumping all over the place. Just staying with it and being consistent.

I thought that I strayed off going here and there and then you start getting wrapped up in mechanics and then this and that.

Just stick with something and go for it and compete."

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Kinston Hitting Coach Jon Nunnally worked closely with Drennen all year on getting him to calm down at the plate and keep his head down on the ball. Drennen is a bit showy at times, and he can sometimes try to do too much at the plate, but after working with Nunnally all season it appears Drennen finally 'got it' by seasons end.

"The main thing with him is making sure he keeps his head down," said Nunnally. "A lot of times with him is when he goes after a pitch he tends to pull his head out because he thinks of the big ball a lot.

He wants that big home run and wants that stuff.

The kid is a really, really good athlete.

The main thing for him is to make sure he keeps his head down and just thinks about driving the ball back through the middle of the field.

He just has a problem with pulling off the ball a lot, especially because his head comes out and he wants to peek."

Nunnally and Drennen have a good working relationship, and Drennen has learned a lot from him. The relationships that Nunnally has between him and his players is amazing to see firsthand as the players really respect him not only as a hitting tutor, but a friend.

"Nuns has been good," said Drennen. "He's taught me some good things, and he's definitely been a good guy to have in the clubhouse. He is a good guy to talk to which is always nice to be able to communicate with the hitting coach.

I have learned a lot about hitting, and taken a lot in this year, and understanding it more."

The Indians are loaded in the organization with good outfield prospects. Due to his age and the players in front of him, Drennen is still a few years away from making an impact at the major league level, if ever. It is very possible, since he will still only be 21-years old at the start of next season, that he could start next year in Kinston to continue his development and also because he is roadblocked by so many outfielders above him at Akron and Buffalo.

Of course, an offseason filled with trades or other moves could clear a better path for him to start in Akron next year.

While he has yet to experience the changes in the game as you move up to the Double-A level, he did notice a difference going from Single-A Lake County to advanced Single-A Kinston.

"It is just a different feel," said Drennen. "Guys are more consistent here [in the Carolina League]. You are up a level, and guys are going to have better command of pitches, and they are going to make plays on you in the outfield where before things may have fallen in for hits.

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It all plays in to your confidence level and just keeping it going where if a guy makes a play on you I am going to get him the next time."

Right now, according to Drennen he is not playing in any winter leagues, although that could have changed recently since we spoke on the subject about two weeks ago. Whether he is playing fall/winter ball or not, he still has a goal this offseason to work on his agility and get stronger.

"I definitely want to focus on keeping flexibility," said Drennen. "I have noticed that I have become more mobile and my flexibility has become better.

Throughout the offseason I want to stretch more and do the yoga type things and just keep my body fluent.

Also when it comes to speed, keep that up, and go see the running guy and just hit the legs.

Get the speed going, and get back up to par."

Drennen certainly was par for the course in 2007, and is still someone to keep an eye on in 2008 and beyond.

Here are a few videos of Drennen in action:

- [Drennen taking batting practice](#)
- [Drennen almost hits a home run](#)
- [Drennen gets a clutch hit](#)
- [More Drennen at the plate](#)