



The Indians are a team that has been built on young talent, and by now fans should know that the Indians will continue to build this team around young talent. As players like Travis Hafner, C.C. Sabathia, and Jake Westbrook hit free agency in the next few years and potentially become tough to re-sign, the Indians will need to look to their minor league system for future core players.

With that, over the course of the 2006 season, the Indians will look to several young prospects to help fill voids at the major league level, and hopefully prove to be a long-term solution.

At this time of the year, numerous baseball publications and websites churn out their top prospect lists. SwerbsBlurbs.com will continue this effort, although with a much different approach. Our prospect list will not necessarily be the Top 10 Prospects in the Indians system as far as talent goes, but are the Top 10 Prospects on the major league doorstep who can have an affect on this team in 2006.

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## Top 10 Impact Prospects for 2006:

### ***1. Fernando Cabrera RHP***

Cabrera is the only prospect who

has a job locked up with the Indians, as he will make the team out of Spring Training and be relied upon to be a big contributor in the bullpen. In late 2005, Indians fans saw glimpses of what makes him a premium relief prospect when he posted a 1.47 ERA and .212 batting average against (BAA) in 15 appearances for the Indians. He is viewed as the Indians best in-house closer solution in the coming years, but for 2006 should initially figure into Rafael Betancourt's 2005 role of pitching

in the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> innings. If he impresses, by season's end he could be the primary 8<sup>th</sup>

inning setup man or even the closer.

## ***2. Kelly Shoppach C***

It remains to be seen if the Indians will go

with one of the veterans Einar Diaz or Tim Laker at backup catcher, or if they will give Shoppach a chance. Most likely, the Indians will break camp with Shoppach as the backup catcher

and keep Diaz and Laker in Buffalo for depth. Shoppach provides a much more potent bat than previous backup catcher Josh Bard did, and comes highly regarded defensively. In 2005 as AAA

Pawtucket, he hit .253 with 26 HRs and 75 RBIs in only 371 at bats. [For a more thorough look at Shoppach, check out the previous article on him at SwerbsBlurbs.com.](#)

# ***3. Ben Francisco OF***

While  
Francisco is not  
one of the  
Indians top  
prospects, he

does figure into  
the team's  
immediate  
plans in the  
outfield.  
Francisco  
projects as a 4<sup>th</sup>

outfielder, and  
can play any  
outfield  
position, has  
nice speed, and  
provides some  
nice pop from

the right-hand  
side of the  
plate. In 2005,  
at Akron and  
Buffalo he hit a  
combined .316  
with 7 HRs, 49

RBI and had  
16 stolen bases  
in 87 games.  
His dazzling  
minor league  
season in 2005  
combined with

his outstanding showing in the winter leagues this offseason have put him into the Tribe's 2006 plans. In

Spring Training,  
the battle for  
the backup role  
in the outfield  
will likely come  
down to  
Francisco and

minor league  
invite Todd  
Hollandsworth.  
Barring injury or  
a complete  
collapse by  
Hollandsworth

he will probably  
win the job.  
Even still,  
Francisco will  
debut and have  
a chance to  
make an impact

with the  
Indians at some  
point in 2006.

***4. Andrew  
Brown RHP***

Andy  
Brown will  
go into  
Spring  
Training as

a  
candidate  
for the  
lone open  
spot in the

bullpen  
where his  
main  
competitio  
n will be

Jason  
Davis, Kaz  
Tadano,  
Steve  
Karsay,

# Jeremy Guthrie and Danny Graves. Brown

possesses

a powerful

mid-90s

fastball

that

touches 96  
MPH, and  
projects as  
a late  
inning

reliever  
with the  
Indians  
beyond  
2006. Last

year in  
Buffalo,  
Brown  
started  
slow but

finished  
strong,  
and ended  
the season  
with an

impressive

1.02 WHIP

and 81:19

K/BB ratio

in 69.2 IP.

Since  
Brown  
does have  
one option  
remaining,

he likely  
will start  
the season  
in Buffalo  
and be the

first call-up  
when a  
bullpen  
arm is  
needed.

***5. Andy***

***Marte 3B***

**Marte is**

**unquestion**

ably the #1  
prospect in  
the Indians  
minor  
league

system.

However,  
with Aaron  
Boone the  
incumbent

3B in 2006

and

making

\$3.75M,

Marte

doesn't  
stand  
much of  
chance to  
make an

immediate  
impact this  
year  
unless  
Boone is

hurt. As a  
21-year  
old at AAA  
Richmond  
(a noted

pitchers  
park) in  
2005,  
Marte hit  
.275 with

20 HRs  
and 74  
RBIs in  
only 389  
at bats.

While  
Marte  
won't  
impact the  
Indians

right away,  
he could  
be a big  
addition to  
the team

in the 2<sup>nd</sup>  
half of the  
season.

**For a**

**more**

**thorough**

**look at**

**Marte,**

**check out**

**the**

previous  
article on  
him at  
SwerbsBI  
urbs.com.

***6. Ryan***

***Garko 1B***

After an  
impressiv  
e two  
years in  
the

minors,  
Garko lies  
on the  
major  
league

doorstep.

In 2004

Garko

combined

to hit .332

with 22  
HRs and  
102 RBIs  
in three  
different

stops in  
Kinston,  
Akron and  
Buffalo,  
and he

followed  
that up in  
2005 by  
hitting  
.303 with

19 HRs

and 77

RBIs at

Buffalo.

He has a

short  
swing,  
which as  
a power  
hitter

allows  
him to  
adjust to  
pitches  
and keep

the  
strikeouts  
down (6:1  
AB/K ratio  
in

minors).

While his

bat is

major

league

ready, he  
is slated  
to spend  
at least  
the first

two  
months in  
Buffalo  
working  
on his

defense

at 1B.

Like

Marte,

Garko

could be  
another  
mid-season  
in addition  
to the club

that gets  
significant  
playing  
time.

# ***7. Brad Snyder OF***

Snyder  
currently  
projects  
as the

Opening  
Day RFR  
in 2007.  
He has

the best  
power in  
the  
organizati

on, and  
his wide  
range of  
skills and

makeup

are

similar to

Grady

Sizemore  
's. In  
2005,  
Snyder

combined  
to hit .278  
with 22  
HRs and

82 RBIs

with 17

stolen

bases at

Kinston  
and  
Akron.  
One big

concern

is he

strikes

out a lot

(158  
times in  
513 at  
bats in

2005), so  
he will  
start the  
season in

Buffalo  
(possibly  
a return  
to Akron

as well)  
to work  
on his  
approach

at the  
plate with  
two-strike  
s and

become

more

discipline

d as a

hitter. If  
he is  
sensational  
al early in

# 2006, and Casey Blake

struggles,  
Snyder  
may be  
the first

# option for Indians GM Mark Shapiro

to turn to  
in RF.

**8. *Tony***

***Sipp***

***LHP***

**This**

might be

a

surprise

to some,

consider

ing Sipp

isn't

even on

the  
40-man  
roster or  
that he

hasn't

made a

pitch

above

A-ball

yet.

Most

fans

don't

know

who

Sipp is,

but the  
best way  
to  
describe

him in

look,

delivery,

and

repertoire

is

Arthur

Rhodes.

Sipp is a  
power  
pitcher,  
and

dominat

ed at

low-A

Lake

# County and High-A Kinston

in 2005,  
posting  
a  
combine

d 2.40

ERA

and .198

BAA

with a  
130:42  
K/BB  
ratio in

116.1  
IP. The  
Indians  
plan to

move

Sipp fast

through

the

system

this

season,

and if he

impress

es

enough,

he could

be a  
valuable  
late  
addition

to the  
Tribe's  
bullpen  
as a

second

lefty

during

the

pennant

race like

Cabrera

was last

year.

**9.**

***Frankli***

***n***

***Gutierr***

***ez OF***

# When the Indians

traded

Milton

Bradley

in a  
deal  
that

landed

them

Gutierrez

z in  
April of  
2004,

the

Indians

probabl

y

envisio

ned

Gutierrez

is being

the

starting  
RFer by  
2006.

Unfortu  
nately,  
injuries

and

slow

develop

ment

have

kept

that

from

becomi

ng a

reality.

His

power

has

been

muted

due to

an

elbow

injury

suffered

in 2004,

going

from 24

HRs in  
2003 to  
only 17

HRs  
combin  
ed the

last two

years.

He

posses

ses

above

average  
speed,  
and is

widely

consider

red the

best

defensi

ve

outfield  
er in the  
Indians

system.

Gutierrez

z will

get

some

conside

ration  
for the  
4<sup>th</sup>

outfield  
er role,  
but

ultimate

ly the

Indians

want

him to

play

everyda

y to

develop

more as  
a hitter,  
so he

will start

in

Buffalo.

Depend  
ing on  
the

need,

he

could

be the

first

called

up if a

need

arises

due to  
injury.

***10.***

***Jerem***

***y***

**Sower**

**s LHP**

Sower

s is

arguab

# ly the Indians #1

pitchin

g

prospe

ct, and  
prior to  
the

signing  
of free  
agent

Jason

Johnso

n was

a good  
bet to  
win the

#5

starter

job

# out of Spring Trainin

g.

Sower

s is not

an

overpo

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(fastba

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ranges

88-92

MPH),

but his

excell

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work

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corner

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the

plate

to

keep

hitters

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ng. A

comm

on

compa

risson

for him

is Tom

Glavin

e. In

2005,

in a  
combin  
ed

three

stops

at

**Kinsto**

**n,**

**Akron**

and

Buffalo

he

went

14-4

with a

2.38

ERA

and

149:29

K/BB

ratio in

159 IP.

With

Johnso

n in

the

fold,

Sower

s will

go to

Buffalo

and

provid

e

depth

to the

Indians  
startin  
g

pitchin

g in

2006.

Since

he is

not on

the

40-ma

n

roster,  
the  
Indians

may

choose

to limit

his

service

time

and  
not  
waste

an  
option  
calling

him up

prior to

Sept 1

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*Honor*

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*mentio*

*ns:*

*Fausto*

*Carmo*

*na*

*RHP,*

*Jason*

*Coope*

*r*

*OF/D*

*H,*

*Chris*

*Coope*

*r LHP,*

*Jerem*

*y*

*Guthri*

*e*

*RHP.*