

Indians Top 50+ Prospects: #16-20

Written by {ga=consigliere}
Monday, January 07 2008 7:00 PM -

Tony's countdown of the top prospects in the Indians farm system continues as we crack into his Top 20. As we go forward, we'll profile just five prospects at a time, and they also get a little more in depth. Showing up in this installment is Jeff Stevens, the pitcher who we recieved straight up for Brandon Phillips, who has gone on to stardom in Cincinnati. While that trade continues to illicit debate and controversy, Stevens performance hasn't. And we could see him in the Tribe bullpen this season.



This is part six of a nine piece installment ranking the Indians top prospects. [Here is a listing of the previous five installments.](#)

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[The Cleveland Indians Minor League Insider](#)

. A listing of the scouting reports for each player will be listed on the left panel for quick access, and these will be updated at times throughout the season with links to new video, pictures, and information.

All photos in this installment are courtesy of Carl Kline. To get in touch with Carl Kline for photo assistance, please e-mail me at tlastoria@theclevelandfan.com and I will forward his e-mail address to you.

All ages as of 04/01/2008

20. David Huff - Left-handed Pitcher

Age: 23 Height: 6'2"; Weight: 190 Bats: Left Throws: Left

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	W	L	ERA	IP
2007 Kinston	4	2	2.71	11
Career	4	3	3.08	15



History: Huff was a supplemental 1st round pick and the first player the Indians selected in the 2006 Draft out of UCLA. After signing, Huff reported to Mahoning Valley, but since he logged so many innings at UCLA earlier in the year he only made four appearances going 0-1 with a 5.87 ERA in 7.2 IP. At UCLA, Huff compiled a 7-4 record and a 2.98 ERA in 16 starts, while striking out 100 in 129.2 innings pitched.

Strengths & Opportunities: Coming out of college, Huff was often compared to Tom Glavine, Barry Zito and Jeremy Sowers. The comparisons to Zito not only came from his approach and repertoire, but Huff's coach at UCLA (John Savage) was also Zito's pitching coach at USC. Huff is a strike-thrower who has excellent command of his pitches. His fastball consistently clocks in at 88-91 MPH, and his changeup is a plus pitch and ranked one of the best in the country coming into the draft.

While he does not overpower hitters, he has unbelievable confidence in his fastball, and commands it well working it to both sides of the plate and to the corners on all four quadrants. He has the best fastball command in the entire system, and is a very polished pitcher. He is aggressive and attacks hitters, and he has a great, athletic delivery which deceives hitters and he repeats it well.

After experiencing soreness on the back of his elbow in late May, Huff was shutdown and it was discovered that he had a strained ligament in his throwing elbow. The Indians feel the injury may have lingered for most of the season as the elbow had been bothering Huff for some time, and they believe they caught the injury before it could get worse. While he only made 11 starts in Kinston last year, he pitched well and was in line for a quick callup to Akron. Huff made up for some of the lost work by pitching in the Arizona Fall League (AFL) this offseason where he went 1-1 with a 6.06 ERA in seven games and posted 15 strikeouts in 16.1 innings pitched. It should be noted the ERA is ballooned by two bad outings, as overall he was outstanding and scouts raved about him in his other appearances.

Huff looks healthy, knows how to pitch, and is smart. He is a pitcher you like to watch pitch

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because he moves the ball around in and out, gets the breaking ball and changeup over and knows how to use them. The key to Huff's future will be the development of an effective breaking ball as a third pitch to use against left-handers. He does throw a curveball, but it still needs a lot of work, and his slider is just average.

Outlook: Going into last season, the Indians felt Huff had the chance to advance through the farm system rapidly like Jeremy Sowers did, but the elbow injury slowed him down. With most of the Indians top pitchers slotted to be in Buffalo to start the season, Huff likely will start the year in the Akron rotation.

Video: [Huff on the mound](#)

19. Carlos Rivero - Shortstop

Age: 19 Height: 6'3" Weight: 200 Bats: Right Throws: Right

	RIS			
2007 Lake County (A-)	.261	115	436	59
Career	.260	234	873	100



History: Rivero was signed out of Venezuela in March of 2005 at just 16 years of age. This upcoming season will be Rivero's fourth year in the Indians system, his third year stateside. In 2005, Rivero played in the Indians academy in the Dominican Summer League and hit .257 with 0 HR and 31 RBI in 237 at bats. In 2006, in combined time at rookie level Burlington and the Indians new rookie league team the Gulf Coast League Indians, Rivero hit .260 with 3 HR and 29 RBI in 200 at bats. Last year, was named a South Atlantic League (SAL) All Star.

Strengths & Opportunities: Coming into last season, Rivero was a hidden gem in the Indians system that finally started to show himself over the course of the season at Lake County. Now at age 19, he is an impressive physical specimen at such a young age. To go along with his size, Rivero has all the outstanding abilities and intangibles except speed. What he lacks in speed, though, he more than makes up with his power potential, bat-to-ball ability, his hands, and his glove-work.

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Rivero has the potential to be a good hitting middle infielder with some power potential down the road. He has a very good approach for a young player, and last year he got better as the year went on and competed at a high level for a kid who just turned 19-years old during the season. Rivero is a big kid with a great looking swing with good technique, and the ball comes off his bat well. He hit a couple home runs last year which were very deep, and could have hit more home runs if he was allowed to pull the ball more, but he was working on staying in the middle of the field. To go along with his excellent makeup, his two strike approach and walk percentage got better as the year went on.

An ankle sprain near the end of June hindered Rivero for most of the second half of the season, but he still managed to put in a good full season in at Lake County. While size is not everything, he is impressive physically and is expected to get even bigger. A report last year in Baseball America even had a scout go as far as to say he could eventually be another player along the lines of Miguel Cabrera.

For his size, he moves around well at shortstop. He is not fast, but he has good first step quickness, has real good hands, and a strong and accurate arm. Whether or not he sticks at shortstop or slides over to third base depends on how big he gets, but the Indians believe he will be able to stick at shortstop long term. Going forward, Rivero needs to keep getting stronger and maintain his first step quickness, and he has been working with minor league infield coordinator Ted Kubiak on getting better jumps to the ball.

Rivero has it all to become an elite prospect given his abilities at such a young age, but like with so many highly touted players at his age, developing his plate discipline, breaking ball recognition, and staying healthy will determine his prospect status down the road. One thing going for Rivero is he already appears to have a good handle with his two-strike approach as in 873 career at bats he has only struck out 141 times. Considering he has played three minor league seasons before the age of 19, an 8:1 at bat to strikeout ratio is very good and shows the potential with his bat-to-ball ability and plate discipline.

Outlook: Make a note of this name, as Rivero could be one of the next great prospects in the Indians farm system. In a system mostly barren when it comes to good middle infield depth, Rivero joins the likes of Josh Rodriguez and Jared Goedert as the top three middle infielders in the system. He should start the season in Kinston, and could be in line for a breakout campaign in 2008.

Video: [Rivero takes batting practice](#) and [batting practice in spring training](#)

18. Kelvin De La Cruz - Left-handed Pitcher

Age: 19 Height: 6'5" Weight: 187 Bats: Left Throws: Left

	WHIP			
2007 GCL/Mahoning	5	4	3.11	15
Career	9	9	3.90	37

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17. John Drennen - Outfielder

Age: 21 Height: 6'0" Weight: 190 Bats: Left Throws: Left

	OPS			
2007 Kinston	.254	131	496	72
Career	.265	280	1017	144



History: The Indians snatched Drennen up with their supplemental pick in the 1st round of the 2005 Draft out of Rancho Bernardo High in San Diego, which has produced a ton of elite high school prospects of late. Knowing Drennen had a scholarship in hand to attend and play at

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UCLA, the Indians quickly signed Drennen for \$1 million. He also made national headlines in June of 2006 when he hit a tape measure home run off future Hall of Famer Roger Clemens.

Strengths & Opportunities: The Indians selected Drennen because they loved his advanced bat and polished approach to hitting. Drennen has a compact build with good power, and also creates a nice smooth bat path with his swing. Although he is somewhat undersized, he packs a lot of punch in his 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. Drennen buffed up some last winter packing on 20 pounds of weight and came into camp in great shape, and this offseason he set goals to continue to work on improving his strength, speed and agility.

Drennen is an extremely hard worker and is very aggressive at the plate, on the bases and in the field. He is an intelligent player, and is an energy player with a motor that does not stop. Aside from a thumb injury he suffered in 2006 that caused him to miss a few weeks of action, Drennen has proven to be a durable player. According to one national league scout, for Drennen's young age he handled the Carolina League well, the ball jumps off his bat and he could be a good left fielder. His playing style, build and ability often has been compared to Jeremy Reed, and some have compared him to former Indian Brian Giles.

In his return trip to Kinston last 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 as 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. While Drennen is a very good hitter, one of the main focal points with his development this coming season will be improving his approach against left-handed pitching.

Drennen is a bit showy at times and sometimes gets wrapped up thinking of the big ball at the plate, which sometimes leads to him trying to do too much with the bat. 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 to drive it back through the middle of the field. He struggled for most of the early part of last year in recognizing the changeup, but he turned things around in the second half and carried it over to the Fall Development Program where he looked great and made very good progress.

Going into next year, the Indians will continue to work with Drennen on getting a better load at the plate so that he has more power overall and against left-handed pitching can drive balls the other way. Drennen also will continue to work on his defense and baserunning. He has good instincts as a runner, but only has slightly above average speed. His biggest weakness is his defense, as his arm is below average and his range in the outfield is limited, which will likely limit him to left field in the future.

Outlook: The Indians have a plethora of good outfield prospects in the upper levels of the organization. Due to his age and the players in front of him, Drennen will not be pushed and the focus will be more on developing a more consistent approach at the plate and see if his hitting potential comes to the surface. Since he will only be 21-years old at the start of next season it is possible he could start the year in Kinston again to continue his development and also because he is road-blocked by so many outfielders above him at Akron and Buffalo. That said, he likely will start the year in Akron.

Video: [Drennen at the plate](#) and [taking batting practice](#) .

16. Jeffrey Stevens - Right-handed Pitcher

Age: 24 Height: 6'1" Weight: 220 Bats: Right Throws: Right

	W	L	IP	ERA
2007 Kinston/Akron	6	3	2.81	49
Career	19	14	3.58	92

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