

Indians Top 50+ Prospects: #6-10

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Tuesday, January 08 2008 7:00 PM -

The creme de la creme. The best of the best. The future of the Cleveland Indians. That's what we're getting into as we start to take a look at Tony Lastoria's top ten prospects in the Tribe farm system. Last year's first round pick Beau Mills and starting pitcher Aaron Laffey are some of the more familiar names that show up in this segment, but the bottom line is, all the guys from here on out should be household names to all Tribe fans.



This is part eight of a nine piece installment ranking the Indians top prospects. Here is a listing of the previous seven installments:

[Intro & Prospects Who Just Missed](#)

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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

10. Beau Mills - Third Baseman

Age: 21 Height: 6'3" Weight: 220 Bats: Left Throws: Right

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	AVG	HR	RBI	OPS
2007 MV/Lake/Kin	.261	62	245	44
Career	.261	62	245	44



History: The Indians drafted Mills in the 1st round of the 2007 Draft out of Lewis-Clark State (ID). As a freshman at Fresno State, Mills hit 22 HR which was a school record for a freshman, and he also ranked 8th in the nation that year in home runs. He played two years at Fresno State, but due to academic reasons the team suspended Mills, so Mills transferred to Lewis-Clark State. In his debut at Lake County last year, Mills hit a grand slam home run.

Strengths & Opportunities: While the results may seem to indicate otherwise, the Indians were very pleased with Mills professional debut last summer, saying he was "outstanding". The Indians feel his makeup, presence, demeanor, and level of intensity are off the charts amazing. He did a very good job of easing into the professional environment at Mahoning Valley, Lake County, and Kinston, and his intensity and the way he got along and interacted with staff members and players who may have three years of professional baseball under their belts was remarkable. The Indians wanted to get his feet wet, and did more than that at three different levels last year. He was a late season callup to Kinston as they were in a playoff push, and the Indians like to expose their top prospects to playoff environments since you get to see them react to different playoff situations where every out, every at bat, and every pitch counts.

Mills has an electric bat with excellent power and strength. He has very good hitting skills, and hits the ball hard and has a nice line drive stroke where he gets good loft to hit balls a long way and punish mistakes. He covers the plate well, and hits the ball well to all fields, and is good at making adjustments at the plate. When he is able to get good extension, he crushes balls. He has a good major league body and size for a corner infield position. He is not a fast runner, but he is smart on the basepaths and makes good decisions.

There is no question that Mills is an excellent hitting prospect, but it is his defense which has set him back in recent years. He moves around well and shows good agility and footwork to where he could be an average third baseman someday, but he has been hindered by a bad shoulder

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which has hurt his throwing. The injury is an impingement in his arm which resulted from inflammation in his shoulder, which he had surgery on over a year ago to correct. The Indians initially had a plan after they drafted him to move him over to first base right away because of the arm issue, but as the season played out they decided to leave him at third base. The Indians feel he has the agility and athleticism to play third base, and they have a lot of confidence in the program their medical staff put him on to strengthen his bothersome shoulder. By the end of the season, the Indians were excited with the improvement Mills showed with the strength in his shoulder and his throwing. Mills had no problems with his shoulder in the Fall Development Program and looked good at third base, which is where he will now stay.

Some of his offensive struggles, especially early at Mahoning Valley, may have had more to do with him making the transition to first base. Mills was learning to play on a new side of the field as he had only ever played third base and it made things a little more difficult trying to learn a whole new position right at the beginning of his pro career. At the end of the season, he was really a lot more comfortable than when he started two months earlier in Mahoning Valley, and a lot of it was attributed to him moving back to third base late in the year. Also, from a hitting perspective, the Indians are working with Mills to get his feet quiet at the plate as he tends to move his feet a little too much when he hits. He also likes to extend his arms, so he can get tied up inside. The key going forward will be to get him to shorten up some so he can better handle those inside pitches.

Outlook: With Mills looking good at third base and responding well to the rehab program the Indians medical staff has laid out for him, the organization wants to see him play third base more before abandoning it and moving him to first base full time. Reportedly, Mills' shoulder is 100% and he is ready to go for spring training. Mills should open the season as the starting third baseman in Kinston.

Video: [Mills at Lake County](#) and at [Kinston](#) .

9. Tony Sipp - Left-hander Pitcher

Age: 24 Height: 6'0" Weight: 190 Bats: Left Throws: Left

	WHIP			
2007 Did not play	-	-	-	-
Career	13	6	2.75	74

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8. Josh Rodriguez - Shortstop

Age: 23 Height: 6'0"; Weight: 185 Bats: Right Throws: Right

2007 Kinston

2007 Kinston	.262	133	493	84
Career	.263	178	650	110



History: The Indians took Rodriguez with their second of four picks in the 2nd round of the 2006 Draft out of Rice University. He finished last season with nine triples, which tied a Kinston franchise record. Also, Rodriguez was just the second player in Kinston history to put up at

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least 20 home runs and 20 stolen bases in a season. The only other person to accomplish the feat is current Kinston hitting coach Jon Nunnally, who put up 24 home runs and 23 stolen bases at Kinston in 1994. Rodriguez also led the Carolina League in runs with 84, and racked up two Carolina League Player of the Week honors (8/13 and 9/4) and also was named a Carolina League Post-Season All-Star.

Strengths & Opportunities: Rodriguez is a patient hitter with gap power who drives the ball well, and has some thunder in his bat. He is a great athlete with a knack for hitting, and in his first full season of professional baseball was driving the ball out of the park in a pitchers park in Kinston. The ball jumps off his bat, and according to scouts his power is for real where they believe he could reproduce his 20-20 (HR and SB) in the majors eventually. Rodriguez is not a big kid, but he has above average bat speed and is an extra base hit machine. Not only did he hit 20 home runs last year, but he also piled up 20 doubles and nine triples, and if you add in his 21 stolen bases you can see why he is much adored as an offensive player because he is a player who can stuff a stat sheet. He has shown the ability to get hot and carry a team, going on a 5 HR, 17 RBI outburst in a six game span in early August last year.

Rodriguez has an excellent throwing arm, and is versatile enough to play anywhere in the infield and even some outfield. He impressed scouts in the Carolina League last year with his defensive abilities, showing good projection as a quality defensive shortstop in the majors with plus arm strength and good lateral range to his left and right. While he is a very good shortstop, some feel he would become an elite prospect at second base because of his dynamite bat, strong arm and range. The Indians were very encouraged by his play at shortstop last year, and while he has the ability to be an everyday major league shortstop, at a minimum the Indians know he has the athleticism and the bat to one day help a major league team as a super utility player.

Rodriguez's swing was a work in progress all last season as he worked extensively with Kinston hitting coach Jon Nunnally to try and find the proper timing and amount of load in his swing. He struggled the first half of the season while he was making all of these adjustments, and only hit .233 with 6 HR, 33 RBI and a .728 OPS. But, the second half of the season was a different story, as he hit .287 with 14 HR, 47 RBI, and an .886 OPS. The reason for Rodriguez's late season success was tied to the adjustments he and Nunnally made at the plate to avoid being so pull conscious by shortening his swing and using the entire field. He finally adapted to getting loaded much quicker and squared to the plate so he could see the ball out of the pitcher's hand better. He loosened his hands as they were real tight, and he also started working from the top of the ball down instead of from the bottom of the ball up.

Going into his draft year, Rodriguez was considered the top shortstop available in preseason draft rankings, but his draft stock plummeted somewhat when he suffered a serious elbow injury in the fall of 2005. The injury limited Rodriguez to designated hitter duty for most of the 2006 season at Rice, and when he returned to the field late in the year he was moved to third base so he would not have to make any long relay throws which could further damage the tendon in his elbow.

Rodriguez is still young and learning, and as he continues to mature he needs to maintain his revamped approach of being shorter to the ball and getting on top of the ball. He still needs more work on recognizing pitches. Also, the Indians want him to become more of a situational hitter by learning to hit the ball differently in different situations, and they worked on that with him in the Florida Development Program this past fall.

Outlook: Like with Wes Hodges, it appears the Indians gamble on drafting Rodriguez with their second round pick has paid off and they may have found another potential steal. After playing a season in Single-A Mahoning Valley and advanced Single-A Kinston the last two years, it looks like Rodriguez's health issues are behind him since he has not been sidelined with any elbow issues. With the need in the system for quality, impact middle infielders, Rodriguez is one to keep an eye on going forward. Rodriguez should open the season as the

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starting shortstop at Akron.

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

7. Aaron Laffey- Left-handed Pitcher

Age: 22 **Height:** 6'0" **Weight:** 185 **Bats:** Left **Throws:** Left

	W	L	ERA	IP
2007 Akr/Buf/Cle	17	6	3.34	31
Career	42	24	3.38	113



History: The Indians drafted Laffey in the 16th round of the 2003 Draft out of high school (Cumberland, MD), and he had committed to playing college baseball with Virginia Tech before signing with the Indians in July of 2003. Laffey made his professional debut in Burlington that year, and in nine games he went 3-1 with a 2.91 ERA and limited batters to a .183 batting average against (BAA) while striking out 46 batters in 34 innings pitched. Laffey jumped onto the prospect scene in 2006 after he combined to go 12-4 with a 3.16 ERA in 29 appearances (23 starts) at Kinston and Akron in 2006. Laffey also impressed in limited time with the Indians late in the season last year, going 4-2 with a 4.56 ERA in nine starts.

Strengths & Opportunities: Laffey is a pitcher who oozes confidence on the mound, and has a fastball that consistently clocks in around 87-89 MPH and has excellent movement. His fastball has very good, heavy sink, he commands it well, and he compliments it with an above average slider and a good changeup. He does not have overpowering stuff so he has to trust his ability to work hitters to his strengths, which is his command, changing speeds and pitching to contact to get them to pound the ball into the ground (2.81 G/F in 2007 and 2.55 G/F in 2006). He is aggressive on the mound, and goes right after hitters and attacks them.

His backdoor slurvy breaking ball is about as good as they get, and was something that came along well for him last year. The development of his breaking ball got him over the hump and became a put away pitch, and as a result his strikeouts per nine innings totals increased from 4.9/9 in 2006 to 6.8/9 in 2007. When he is on, the backdoor breaking ball is an un-hittable pitch

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as it is a matter of whether he is going to get the call with it, and if so there is nothing a hitter is going to do with it. If he is commanding it, it is big enough that it starts out of the zone and lands just in it. Laffey also handled the emotions of transitioning up and down from Buffalo to Cleveland exceptionally well last year, which shows his off the charts makeup and confidence. He fields his position arguably as well as any pitcher in baseball.

The development of Laffey's changeup and him being able to throw to opposite arm side were other big reasons he developed into one of the Indians best pitching prospects last year. In the past, Laffey had problems improving his mechanics and developing his changeup, which many felt would make him a lefty specialist down the road. A pitcher with his stuff, size and groundball rate may be better suited in the bullpen, but the Indians plan to keep him as a starter (for now). His durability and consistency project him as a solid #3 or #4 starter who eats innings in the big leagues.

When you look at Laffey's minor league resume, he has been consistent every year putting up an ERA somewhere between the mid-twos and mid-threes at every stop and every year except for one stop in half a season at Lake County in 2004. Laffey was called up last year to Buffalo in late May because of promotions and injuries to the Buffalo staff, and what looked like a short cup of coffee in Buffalo turned into a permanent stay after he impressed Indians officials, and he eventually moved up to Cleveland. In six starts at Akron before his callup to Buffalo, Laffey was 4-1 with a 2.31 ERA. He struggled in his first three Buffalo starts going 0-3 with an 8.64 ERA, but suddenly things all came together as he put up one of the most dominating months ever seen from a starting pitcher in the Indians farm system. In six June starts, Laffey went 6-0 with a 0.87 ERA and set a Buffalo Bisons record by winning six games in one month. From June 2nd on, in 13 starts Laffey was 9-0 with a 1.92 ERA, and became the first Buffalo starting pitcher in history to win nine consecutive decisions.

Outlook: Laffey transformed into a new pitcher and minor league sensation seemingly overnight last year. Last season was the first time Laffey started a season in the starting rotation, as in previous years he started the year in the bullpen and eventually earned his way into a starting spot. This is no longer the case as he will battle Cliff Lee and Jeremy Sowers in spring training for the #5 starter spot in Cleveland, and if he does not win it will be part of a strong and deep Buffalo starting rotation to start 2008.

6. Nick Weglarz - Outfielder

Age: 20 Height: 6'3" Weight: 215 Bats: Left Throws: Left

	OPS			
2007 Lake/Kinston	.274	127	446	76
Career	.262	169	595	98

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[Waglarz at the plate](#)