

Indians Top 50+ Prospects: Wrapup

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Saturday, January 19 2008 7:00 PM -

Tony checks back in with the final installment of his amazing piece on the Indians Top 50 Prospects in their farm system, and in it, gives us a little recap to expand on the articles and give some extra insight into the thinking on the series, seeing as how he left opinion out of the actual scouting reports. Tony also sequentially links the entire series inside for any fans that may have missed it the first time around.



This is the final installment of the Indians 2008 Top 50+ Prospects series. This is a recap to expand a little on the articles and give some extra insight into the thinking on these pieces since I left opinion out of the actual scouting reports. I received several e-mail responses and many questions which I answered privately, but after thinking about it felt it best to share some of the common questions that probably many people actually had.

Here is a recap of the articles:

[Intro & Prospects Who Just Missed](#)

[Top ; 2007 Draft & Dominican Summer League Prospects](#)

[Top Prospects #41-50](#)

[Top Prospects #31-40](#)

[Top Prospects #21-30](#)

[Top Prospects #16-20](#)

[Top Prospects #11-15](#)

[Top Prospects #6-10](#)

[Top Prospects #1-5](#)

Also, here is a breakdown of the rankings by position. Players ranked 1 to 50 are listed below with their ranking in parentheses next to their name. Also, for each position, the number in parentheses is the total number of players ranked at that

position. Clearly, the Indians area of strength is pitching, particularly with left-handed starters and right-handed relievers. Also, the Indians have good depth in the outfield, first base and catcher. The infield still has little depth, as a total of five players were ranked at second base, shortstop and third base.

Of note, out of the 18 ranked right-handed pitchers, nine of them project to be relievers (or already are): Jensen Lewis, Jeff Stevens, Paolo Espino, Sung-Wei Tseng, Mike Pontius, Luis Perdomo, Eddie Mujica, Michael Finocchi, and Randy Newsom. Out of the 11 ranked left-handed pitchers, two of them project to be relievers (or already are): Tony Sipp and Reid Santos. There are some right-handers and left-handers who are tweeners like Ryan Edell and Shawn Nottingham, but for now they still are being looked at as starting pitchers.

Right-Handed Pitchers (18)

Adam Miller (1)
Jensen Lewis (4)
Jeff Stevens (16)
Hector Rondon (22)
Paolo Espino (26)
Jeanmar Gomez (27)
J.D. Martin (28)
Sung-Wei Tseng (30)
Mike Pontius (32)
Frank Herrmann (35)
Sean Smith (38)
Santo Frias (40)
Luis Perdomo (42)
Eddie Mujica (43)
Erik Stiller (44)
Michael Finocchi (46)
Brian Slocum (49)
Randy Newsom (50)

Left-Handed Pitchers (11)

Chuck Lofgren (5)
Aaron Laffey (7)
Tony Sipp (9)
Scott Lewis (14)
Kelvin De La Cruz (18)

Matt McBride (15)
Chris Gimenez (24)
Robbie Alcombrack (34)
Wyatt Toregas (37)

First-Basemen (5)

Jordan Brown (2)
Michael Aubrey (23)
Chris Nash (25)
Stephen Head (29)
Ryan Mulhern (47)

Second Baseman (1)

Jared Goedert (13)

Shortstops (2)

Josh Rodriguez (8)
Carlos Rivero (19)

Third-Basemen (2)

Wes Hodges (3)
Beau Mills (10)

Outfielders (7)

Nick Weglarz (6)

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David Huff (20)
Reid Santos (21)
Ryan Morris (31)
Ryan Miller (33)
Ryan Edell (36)
Shawn Nottingham (48)

Ben Francisco (11)
Trevor Crowe (12)
John Drennen (17)
Cirilo Cumberbatch (39)
Brad Snyder (41)
Ryan Goleski (45)

Who was eligible:

To be consistent with other publications, this was entirely based on rookie eligibility for innings pitched or at bats. A player loses their rookie status once they reach 50 career innings or accrue 130 career at bats in the major leagues. Service time is also considered when factoring rookie eligibility, but this was not considered.

As a result, players like Asdrubal Cabrera, Franklin Gutierrez, Andy Marte, and Rafael Perez were not considered for this list because last year or the year prior they reached the innings pitched or at bat threshold. Other players like Jensen Lewis, Ben Francisco and Aaron Laffey were still eligible as they fell under the threshold, and Laffey actually was just under as he pitched 49.1 innings last year.

What was the basis behind the rankings?

Some rate prospects purely on results, some on standing (i.e. what level they are playing), while others purely on potential/projection. I combined all three to try and strike a balance between projection with the young guys in lower levels with tools and big potential versus more of the seasoned minor leaguers in the upper levels who have performed well.

Admittedly, I generally favored projection more, especially with the very young kids versus some of the minor league veterans. For example, some may question how I could put Mike Pontius, Ryan Miller or Ryan Morris ahead of guys like Sean Smith, Ryan Mulhern, and Ryan Goleski as the latter three will be in Buffalo and all have had varied minor league success to date. However, the end point is what kind of player does the player have the potential to be? Guys like Smith, Goleski and Mulhern have pretty much reached their ceiling and are who they are, while guys like Pontius, Miller and Morris are nowhere close to their ceiling, they project very well, and in the long run they have potential to be much more than Goleski, Smith and Mulhern. Of course, with the volatility of young players, they also could be much less, which is the risk of rating young players high.

The rankings are arbitrary, and they really are just a guideline of the best players to watch out for and most importantly provide scouting information on each player so fans know who they are. Any list is subjective as while I left opinion out of the actual scouting reports, there was opinion factored into the actual rankings as these rankings came directly from our group conversations and not recommended by the Indians.

The basis for the rankings was not to rank these players based on who is closest to the big leagues or who has performed the best. Potential and projection, at least to me, got a lot of weight, and then after that actual performance and standing were considered. Bottom line, as of January 2008 I like to think of the list as a snapshot from 1 to 50 of players with the best chance to be impact major leaguers, where Miller at #1 has the best chance, Brown at #2 the next, and so on.

Where would Matt Whitney and Brian Barton have been?□

Whitney would have been #7 on this list, and Barton #17. Another notable change is McBride would have been #9 had he not had shoulder surgery this offseason.

By popular request, I will soon post the scouting reports that would have posted for both Barton and Whitney. These two were lost in the Rule 5 Draft before I finished the reports, and I pulled them from the listing, but seeing as how they both could return I now think it would be best if I added them for reference. Plus, it may provide a little more insight into what we lost (and may get back).

Who are the biggest candidates to bust or breakout this year?

As with any prospect list, a lot of players will not live up to the hype and expectations, while some others will solidify their status, and yet others will take their game to the next level.

As far as potential breakouts are concerned, I really like Kelvin De La Cruz a lot. One of the reasons he is up so high is the feeling he is on the verge of a breakout season and about to establish himself as a legit top pitching prospect. Another one is Mike Pontius who I think has the makings of a very good late inning reliever down the road, perhaps even a closer in the making. Chris Nash is going to have a big year in Lake County, and while Goedert already broke out in 2007, I think he puts up a great year in 2008 to solidify himself as an explosive offensive second baseman.

Potential busts really center around the younger players since they are still so raw and have little track record where they are being ranked mostly because of projection. Some of the players who I think may not live up to their potential this year would be John Drennen, Beau Mills, Robbie Alcombrack, Ryan Miller, and Jeanmar Gomez. Obviously, these guys are all in the Top 50 so I think highly of them, and it is hard to say why they may struggle this year, but if forced to predict the ones who to have a rough go at it in 2008 these would be my picks.

How strong is the system?□

If you ranked the Indians up against the other 31 clubs in baseball, the Indians fall somewhere in the middle of the pack, probably somewhere around 14th to 17th. Some may view this as a sign the system is on a downward slide and our talent pool is starting to dry up, but actually this is more a temporary step back as the Indians have

lost many prospects in the last two years to graduation to the majors, in trades, or in the Rule 5 Draft.

The Indians are sort of in an in-between phase with their system. They are generally lauded by people around baseball for having amazing depth in the farm system, but aside from that at this point the Indians have few if any marquee prospects. The reason for this is because over the past two years so many have graduated to the major league level, been traded, or lost in the Rule 5 Draft, and also because many of their top prospects are young and in the lower levels.

What hurts the Indians the most is the 2006 and 2007 Drafts are still coming around, and the Indians lacked any real high round picks last year. The Indians had one pick in the first three rounds last year (Mills, 1st), whereas the previous year in 2006 they had six picks in the first three rounds and in 2005 had five! To take nothing away from the players drafted from the fourth round on, only having one pick in the first three rounds left the organization little options in adding some high profile prospects last year. Also, they have not added very many impact international signings.

Going forward, players like Jared Goedert, Josh Rodriguez, Nick Weglarz, Beau Mills, Kelvin De La Cruz,

and so on all have the potential to be big time prospects and had very good to fantastic years last year, but they really need to show they can continue to grow and perform again in 2008. If they do that, the Indians have some star potential on the horizon and some possible blue-chippers when the 2009 rankings come out.

Look out for the Whitney and Barton writeups soon on my blog [The Cleveland Indians Minor League Insider](#), and I'll continue to update the site with any news between now and the start of minor league spring training (beginning of March).

I'll be in Winter Haven for about ten days from Saturday 3/15 through Monday 3/24, and will report on what I see and hope to see many of you there!

