

Gimenez Is Starting To Catch On

Written by {ga=consigliere}
Saturday, May 17 2008 7:00 PM -

Chris Gimenez was the Indians 19th round pick in the 2004 Draft out of The University of Nevada, and is presently the every day catcher for the Tribe at AA Akron. Gimenez is off to a good start to the 2008 season, and also can play the corner infield and outfield positions ... which sure won't hurt his chances of making it to the big league club some time next season. Tony recently was out in Akron to watch the Aeros, and had a chance to sit down and talk with Akron's engaging young backstop.



When you want to sit down and talk baseball, you talk to Chris Gimenez. When you want to talk about catching, he's your guy as well.

In fact, if you want to talk about anything, go find him and he'd likely sit down and talk with you for hours.

That's just who Gimenez is, a conversationalist with an upbeat and engaging personality. Over the years the 6'2" 200-pound catcher has started to make a name for himself as a media darling because he always is a great interview and quote machine.

Some players have trouble talking to the press, and sometimes pulling answers from them is like pulling teeth, but the words flow from Gimenez where he may spend five minutes replying to every question you ask and would likely talk to you all night if you let him.

So, when it came time to talk to Gimenez in Akron a few weeks back, he had a lot to share in regard to learning and adapting to playing the catching position full-time.

Gimenez was a 19th round pick in the 2004 Draft out of The University of Nevada. Prior to this season Gimenez was an everyday utility player who played everywhere on the diamond from

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left field, to third base to catcher.

That all changed this year as the Indians are now focused on him developing as a catcher and have made him a full-time starter at the position in Double-A Akron.

To date, according to Gimenez the transition to the full-time role has gone well.

"I'm still trying to get this whole catching thing down," said Gimenez in a recent interview at Canal Park in Akron. "Obviously it is a game of adjustments, especially behind the plate. I feel like I am on the right track, and [minor league catching coordinator Tim Laker] has been here to help me out more with the physical aspect of it and [pitching coach Tony Arnold] has really been helping me out with the mental aspect of it."

Since spring training, Gimenez has put a lot of extra work in before games working on his mechanics with Laker. One of the tools he and Laker have used is the [ProBatter](#) machine where Gimenez has worked on receiving different types of pitches from a giant video screen where a life-sized pitcher goes through his windup and when he releases the pitch a ball shoots out of a hole in the screen.

The system allows you to choose several options such as any of eight different pitch types that can be thrown from 40 to 100 MPH, what hand the pitcher throws with, difficulty setting, and throwing a pitch to any location inside and outside the strike zone.

"It throws every pitch, so it is good to get some drills in where if I feel like I am stabbing at a ball down and away I can sit there and work on stuff," said Gimenez. "We worked on leaning with the pitch.

I have had some times where a guy will throw a cut fastball and I am not expecting it like I should be.

I try to grab it while it cuts rather than going out there and getting it as much as I can.

Just little things like that."

In addition to receiving the ball, Gimenez is still working on his throwing. Having just picked up the position after converting to catcher after being an outfielder or third baseman his entire life is tough. Gimenez is

still working through all the mechanical issues with being quick with his release and also making an accurate throw down to second to cut down a would be base-stealer.

This is especially tough for someone who has limited experience as a catcher and grew up as an outfielder.

"We have worked on the catching and transferring because I have more of an outfielder's throwing motion," said Gimenez. "We have been working for awhile on shortening

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my throw up. It really has helped my throws a bit, because last year if I got a ball down there without it going everywhere that was good, but now for the most part I am pretty much nails with it.

Still, I think I have thrown only one guy out (through about two weeks ago) and it is definitely something that is irritating me.

It is a crucial part.

I feel like everything is bang-bang and I am not getting any calls.

I know they will come but my main worry right now is my game calling and I need to get a little better at that."

Probably the toughest thing to learn for any catcher is game-calling. As a catcher, you have to be the most informed player on the diamond about the opponent you are playing so you can make the right decisions on pitch selection and location.

Initially Gimenez had trouble with this aspect of catching because when he was converted to a catcher in 2006 he was not playing there everyday and only caught a few games.

Last year, the first half of the season he was only catching every third day in Kinston, but in the second half of the season he caught everyday.

"I think I have the major parts of catching down, it is the tiny things like the reading swings thing," said Gimenez. "Laker has this catching book that he made in spring training about all of this stuff that he has ever talked about or learned as a catcher in his day and he wrote it all down for me. It is awesome. I guess I am just being a little hard on myself, but that is the way I am I guess.

I want to be perfect at everything, and when I don't do something right I want to know how to do it right.

It is growing pains, and I am learning the hard way as there is really no other way to do it because I have never really been taught how to call a game and here I am at Double-A where guys can hit a little bit.

Another thing I have to realize is when a guy does not have his best stuff.

You have to find things to help a guy out."

This season, it is the first time Gimenez has been an everyday guy behind the plate, and he has often looked to veteran backup catcher Armando Camacaro and pitching coach Tony Arnold for help. Gimenez gets to the ballpark early everyday to watch video of the opponents and study their stats and hit charts to find potential weaknesses in how to attack them. This is all part of learning how to call a game.

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"Camacaro and Arnold have been amazing," said Gimenez. "Arnold has helped me out a ton with the mental aspect of catching.

Setting guys up and really reading swings because that is such an important part of catching.

They video tape the game and I watch the hitters.

I am usually one of the first ones here and I sit down and watch.

I go over what the lineup is going to be and hit everything.

We print out all of their stats, who are the base-stealers, who are the guys we want to keep close to first, who are the power and RBI guys, the guys who have more strikeouts than walks and may be more impatient.

That way I can get a little more of a game-plan going into the game that night."

The game-calling lies 100% at the feet of Gimenez, as he calls the entire game with no assistance from the dugout. Sure, he may get some pointers from coaches before the game and between innings, but once he is out there and the pitches are being thrown he is making all the decisions.

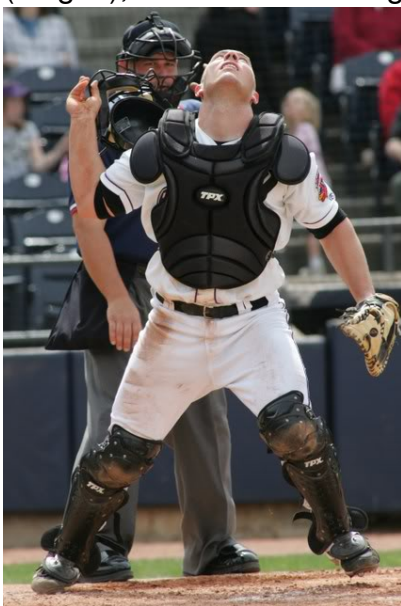
call a game.

So far, it has been a work-in-progress in learning to

From at bat to at bat and pitch to

pitch Gimenez is learning and discovering new things.

"It is weird, as I find myself pitching to how I would be pitching to myself," noted Gimenez. "If I was at the plate, 'what would I be looking for here'. I am not every hitter (laughs), and it is something I am realizing now."



There was one sequence in a recent game where Gimenez learned a lot. It came on April 29th against Erie with Wilkin Ramirez at the plate.

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Ramirez is a big power-hitting outfielder in the Tigers farm system that is extremely strong and one of the top hitters in the Eastern League.

In his first three plate appearances that day against Akron left-handed starter Ryan Edell he was 3-for-3 with a double and two home runs.

When he came to the plate in the 7th inning for his fourth at bat against right-handed reliever Scott Roehl, Gimenez adapted and made some great calls.

In Ramirez's first at bat, Gimenez and left-handed starter Ryan Edell were trying to go slider down and in because Ramirez has a lot of strikeouts and he will swing at a lot of balls that are out of the strike zone. Edell ended up leaving the slider up and Ramirez hit a double to left field. Next time up, Gimenez said that since Ramirez hit a slider up that he wanted to get ahead of him by flipping him a curveball and then go changeup-changeup just to get him to look at something else. But again Edell left one up and Ramirez tattooed it for a home run.

In his fourth at bat, Gimenez had right-handed reliever Scott Roehl start Ramirez off again with a first pitch slider and he kind of yanked off of it. Gimenez came back and called for a fastball in on Ramirez's hands, but Roehl missed badly away.

Luckily, Ramirez missed it.

On 0-2, Gimenez had Roehl bounce a curveball in there to see if he could get Ramirez to expand the zone, but Ramirez did not offer much less flinch.

This was the key part of the at bat, as the scout I was sitting with at the game said the fact Ramirez did not even flinch at the curveball was a clear sign he was sitting dead red fastball. When I told Gimenez after the game what the scout said, this was something Gimenez did not realize during the at bat and felt it was a great point.

Anyway, on 1-2 Gimenez called for the slider away again and they got Ramirez to swing and miss.

It was really an excellent pitch sequence to see how Gimenez and Roehl attacked one of the Eastern League's best hitters, and it impressed the scout I was sitting with.

In all, Gimenez feels like he has adapted well to the catching position and that it is somewhere he can stick long term. Being able to catch, even just as an emergency third catcher, will be a big benefit to him as he looks to reach the big leagues. Being in Double-A, he really is on the doorstep and is now just fine tuning his game.

His ability to play any infield and outfield corner position along with being a catcher will help him break into the big leagues on the bench for the Indians or someone else at some point.

"I really do think I can stick at this," said Gimenez about catching. "I know that

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it will only help me in the long run [with getting to the big leagues].

It is good playing here full-time because it makes my life a lot easier.

I am so used to going everywhere, but if I am going to embody this thing and really be someone they can count on back there then I need to do it."