

## Bryson Settles In With Indians

Written by {ga=consigliere}  
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As the aftermath of the C.C. Sabathia trade starts to wind down, the players received in the deal are doing their best to fit into their new home in the Cleveland Indians organization. One of those players settling into their new home is pitcher Rob Bryson. Bryson has all the makings of a late-inning reliever someday and is currently pitching out in Eastlake for the Lake County Captains. Tony was out in Lake County last week and had a chance to sit down and talk to the highly touted reliever about his experience with the trade and what he can bring to the Indians organization.



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The Indians received four new high level prospects for Sabathia, of which at this time three of them are known. Outfielder/first baseman Matt LaPorta was the headliner of the trade and is off to a good start in Akron, left-hander Zach Jackson is pitching well in Buffalo, and the fourth part of the trade which is a player to be named later will be unveiled sometime in the next several weeks.

The other player received in the deal is heralded right-handed pitching prospect Rob Bryson.

While much of the post-trade attention has been on LaPorta, and deservedly so, depending on who the player to be named ends up being, Bryson arguably will be the second best player the Indians acquire in the deal. Bryson is a few years away from the big leagues still as he was pitching in the South Atlantic League at Single-A West Virginia prior to the trade, and after the trade he was assigned to Lake County which is at the same level and in the same league.

At West Virginia this year, Bryson was 3-2 with a 4.25 ERA and in 55 innings had allowed 43 hits, 20 walks and struck out 73.

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Last year at rookie-level Helena, Bryson was 3-0 with a 2.67 ERA and 8 saves in 18 appearances, and in 54 innings allowed 49 hits, 12 walks and had 70 strikeouts.

Going through the trade has been a whirlwind of an experience for Bryson, who is still trying to settle in after all the craziness surrounding the trade and media hoopla after it.

"It sure was a crazy couple nights, that's for sure," said Bryson in an interview at Lake County last week. "I was planning on going on the bus trip [with my team back] to West Virginia, then they told me I was being promoted to the Florida State League so I was packing for that. Then an hour later they told me I was heading over to the Indians. Then the following morning I talked to [Indians Farm Director] Ross Atkins and he told me I was coming to Lake County.

I know [Lake County relievers] Josh Judy and Jonathan Holt and I got in touch with them, and they kind of showed me the ropes over here.

I am feeling comfortable now and starting to settle in a little bit as I have been here for about a week now.

I am struggling a little bit on the baseball side though, and not doing as well as I would like to be."

Bryson has had a so-so start in the early going at Lake County as in three appearances he is 0-1 with a 4.76 ERA and in 5.2 innings has allowed five hits, five walks and only struck out two batters. The early struggles are to be expected, especially with a young player still coming down from the emotions of a big trade and now feeling like he has to immediately prove his value. Once that wears off, Bryson should settle in. He is young and is still working on refining his fastball command, but as a 20-year old in Single-A his struggles with his command in the early going certainly point to him trying to overcome some post-trade jitters.

"Unfortunately, he could not locate as well as he wanted to [last] Sunday as he walked a few guys," said Lake County Captains Manager Aaron Holbert. "I think he is starting to hopefully calm down a little bit.

The trade jitters are getting out of him and now it is just about going out and performing.

He was in that trade for a reason.

Scouts went out and saw some good things, and we have seen some good things.

It is a matter of him getting comfortable out there and settling in with the Cleveland Indians now."

While the trade jitters have affected Bryson somewhat, part of his problem stems from some recent changes to his mechanics that were handed down by the Brewers which he has had a hard time adjusting to and getting comfortable with.

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"Yeah, normally I am not a guy who struggles with command," said Bryson. "Usually I have good command of all my pitches.

I changed some things mechanically that the Brewers wanted me to do, and I wasn't comfortable there for awhile.

Right now I am kind of in that in-between point.

I am not where I should be, that's for sure.

I hate walking guys.

That is a big pet peeve of mine."

For the short term, the Indians will make little if any changes to the way Bryson pitches. The Indians will have more of a hands-off-approach until he settles in and they can properly evaluate him over the course of several outings.

"Talking to [Lake County pitching coach] Ruben [Niebla], that is pretty much what he told me," said Bryson. "They are going to let me go out and pitch. They are going to give me the ball and let me do my own thing for now, and if there are any adjustments to be made they will do it down the road and not now though.

I definitely think there are some adjustments that need to be made.

I don't know, I am just not 100% comfortable right now."

Bryson's bullpen role he had in the Milwaukee organization will not change, as he will pitch in what the Indians term a "priority" bullpen role. What that means is he will throw every three days and for two to three innings an appearance, usually around 40 pitches.

The idea is to stretch him out and ensure he faces both left-handed and right-handed hitters, and to continue to develop all three of his pitches.

"We would like him to see an entire lineup so he sees both left-handed and right-handed hitters and has to use his pitches to get through those nine guys," said Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins. "He has such a powerful fastball that if he were just to come in and face three guys he could probably cruise through the league with very little trouble just using his fastball. So, we are going to try and stretch him out and get him to use his other pitches and develop his breaking ball most specifically."

Bryson throws two plus-pitches, a fastball that tops out as high as 96 MPH and a wicked slider.

He also throws a changeup that is a work in progress, and by throwing two to three innings an outing it will give him a chance to continue developing the pitch.

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"Yeah, I have been developing a changeup the last year and a half," said Bryson. "It's getting there, but it is definitely not my go to pitch that's for sure."

I think that is the biggest part why they don't want to label me a closer because they want me to come out of the pen and face a whole lineup instead of three or four guys so I can develop that pitch."

Bryson's outstanding fastball-slider mix projects him as a serious prospect in the backend of the bullpen. When he signed with Milwaukee last year he initially pitched out of the bullpen with short-season Helena and then the last two weeks of the season made a couple starts.

The starting role carried over into the beginning of this season at West Virginia, but after five starts he was moved back into the bullpen where he has been ever since.

Pitching out of the bullpen and in a late inning role is something that Bryson welcomes and actually prefers. His bulldog mentality and good makeup on the mound to go along with his repertoire certainly point to a future in the big leagues in such a role.

"Yeah, I'll do whatever role they want," said Bryson. "I gotta say I like closing and coming out of the bullpen better as it is a different mindset."

But, if they have plans to put me as a starter, I enjoy either one.

I am out on the mound competing either way, so whatever gets me moving up the ladder that's what I would rather be doing."

The Indians really like Bryson's potential as an impact late-inning reliever. While they do not develop relievers as closers per se in the minors, Bryson is one who will get some experience in the role from time to time, but the focus will always be on developing his pitches.

"From time to time he will close a game, but it will be the third inning of his performance," said Atkins. "He'll come in and face an entire lineup and maybe pitch the seventh, eighth and ninth to get that save. But what we like to do is have a guy face three left-handed hitters if he is right-handed and make sure he is developing that second and third pitch. A guy that dominant, if he comes in and faces just three hitters he is not going to get exposed until he gets to the next level. So we are going to do everything we can to develop him at that level to the best extent that we can before he goes on to Kinston, before he goes to Double-A and before he is a major leaguer."

Before officially signing with Milwaukee last year, Bryson was a draft-and-follow player who was picked in the 31st round of the 2006 Draft out of high school. Milwaukee took a wait and see approach with Bryson before signing him as they wanted to see how he pitched in summer ball and the next year in junior college before signing him, hence his draft-and-follow status.

"Honestly, my senior year of high school I was a borderline guy," said Bryson. "I wasn't even sure if I was going to be drafted."

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So, if I wasn't drafted I was going to stay local and maybe go to junior college.

Then when I was drafted I said that maybe I have a shot of playing pro ball, so I went down to Florida since there are a lot more opportunities down there in my view.

There are a lot more people that get to see you.

So I went down there and put up good numbers and had a good year.

I really developed a lot once I got down there, so it helped a lot.&quot;

Bryson is a native of New Castle, Delaware, so the move to Florida was a big change. But, it helped his growth as a player.

He wasn't ready for life in the professional ranks when he was first drafted, but after a year in junior college ball he was ready and ended up signing with the Brewers for \$300,000.

&quot;It was more that they wanted to see me develop a little more,&quot; said Bryson. &quot;I needed to be polished up a little bit.

I wasn't ready for pro ball out of high school that's for sure.

I was a completely different pitcher coming out of junior college than I was in high school.

That one year in junior college made a huge difference.&quot;

Bryson has come a long way since his junior college season, which was a turning point in his career. After being traded to the Indians, Bryson now has hit another turning point in what looks to be a very promising career.