

A Wild Offseason Awaits Herrmann

Written by {ga=consigliere}

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When you think of immediate major league starting depth that the Indians will have stashed away in the minors next year, the names of lefties David Huff and Scott Lewis come to mind. Another pitcher who has entered that mix is Akron right-hander Frank Herrmann. Tony had a chance to speak with him last week about his emergence and his potential future with the big league club.



When you think of immediate major league starting depth that the Indians will have stashed away in the minors next year, the names of lefties David Huff and Scott Lewis come to mind. Another pitcher who has entered that mix is Akron right-hander Frank Herrmann.

Herrmann is a relatively unknown prospect, a player who went to Harvard University and went undrafted in the 2005 Draft before the Indians signed him in August of 2005 as an undrafted free agent. Generally considered a middle-of-the-road prospect who provides good depth in the farm system, Herrmann's prospect standing has strengthened since last year after he went 11-8 with a 4.14 ERA in 26 combined starts between Kinston, Akron and Buffalo this season.

For Herrmann himself, it was a satisfying year and one where he grew a lot as a pitcher.

"I am happy with [my season] and I thought I had a good year," said Herrmann last week at Canal Park in Akron. "They always say it is not how you start it is how you finish, and I think my last two months I [did] better than I could of hoped.

I think just going to Buffalo and getting the opportunity helped as I was able to take advantage of it and then keep rolling off that confidence-wise."

The opportunity Herrmann is speaking of is when he made consecutive spot starts on July 5th and 10th for Triple-A Buffalo. Prior to the opportunity Herrmann was 8-3 with a 5.44 ERA in 16 combined starts between Kinston and Akron, but upon going to Buffalo things started to click for Herrmann where in those two starts he went 0-2 with a 1.38 ERA.

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Herrmann carried that success with him back to Akron where he finished out the year going 3-5 with a 2.23 ERA in 10 combined starts at Akron and Buffalo.

"I think one of the things I have been able to do the last couple of years is finish up strong," said Herrmann. "Some guys will tail off near the end of the season, but my velocity [went] up as the year went on this year and I got stronger.

I think that confidence from having two consecutive starts where I did well in Buffalo and saw I could pitch at that level helped me when I came back [to Akron] as I had the mindset I could get guys out."

His experience in Buffalo was short. In fact, he never really had time to take in the city or get to know his new teammates since he came into town the day of for both starts and left both times to go back to Akron right after the game.

"It was a whirlwind day both times," recalled Herrmann. "It wasn't like 'hey you are here for several days' as I spent just two days there.

I wasn't there the day before or after, just the day of both times.

It was cool as I knew I was coming back both times, but I found out the night before and left the day of both times.

So one day I got a ride from one of the Binghampton stadium workers to Rochester, and the other time I took a flight from here early morning to Buffalo.

Both days were kind of crazy, and sometimes it is better off as you don't have time to think and you just go out there and react and play."

When it comes to consistency in the Indians farm system, Herrmann is at the top of that list. He has lived up to his nicknames of "Frank the Tank" and "The Herrmannator" because of his ability to eat innings and seemingly never give in.

In addition to his 26 combined starts this year where he went 11-8 with a 4.14 ERA, Herrmann also made 26 starts with Lake County in 2006 going 4-6 with a 3.97 ERA and 26 starts for Kinston in 2007 and went 11-5 with a 4.01 ERA.

At 6'4" 220-pounds Herrmann has the physical makeup to be an innings eater and go out there every night and give his team a chance to win, which is what he has done so far in his three year professional career. He is armed with a sinking fastball that sits in the low 90s and has gotten it up to as high as 94 MPH.

The key to Herrmann's success is his bulldog mentality and his intelligence in coming up with a good game plan to attack hitters.

In addition to his fastball he also throws a changeup and slider, but he has always been a pitcher who relied heavily on a fastball-changeup mix and had lacked a good breaking ball until this year.

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"He is a bright kid, works hard, is durable, and has been able to maintain his velocity," said Akron pitching coach Tony Arnold. "In fact lots of times his velocity increases as the year goes on. The biggest thing with Frank is he has never really had a third pitch as he has always been fastball-changeup.

From last year to this year his breaking ball has gotten so much better and is getting more consistent, and with that third pitch it allows him to attack hitters better."

Herrmann agrees that the biggest change for him this year was the development of his slider and the confidence he has in it now.

"If I had to pick one thing that is different this year other than my confidence it would have to be my slider," said Herrmann. "I didn't strike many guys out earlier in the year, and the days I had the higher strikeouts [later in the year] meant I had a good slider.

I changed it from more of a loopy slurve type pitch to a hard slider where I am throwing it like 83-84 MPH.

I am not trying to finesse it, just trying to throw it more as a power pitch and throw it down in the zone.

It is a pitch I am not going to get beat with and hang where they hit one out.

If I miss with it, it is in the dirt for a ball."

After piling up 150 innings and staying healthy all year, Herrmann will not participate in the Instructional League or play any fall or winter ball this offseason in order to give his arm a rest. There is a possibility he is invited to take part in the Indians Winter Development Program at Progressive Field this coming January, but aside from that he will spend most of the offseason resting his arm and instead putting his Economics degree from Harvard to good use.

"I kind of get stir crazy [in the offseason]," said Herrmann. "Last year I did an internship on Wall Street to do private equity kind of stuff.

This year I will probably do the same thing since my buddy works at a trading place in New York City so I am going to go intern there and hang out.

It is tough to get a day off doing that finance stuff on Wall Street in New York, and you always have to think long term too.

I don't want to have to start at square one when baseball is up, so I have these internships which will help me bypass that entry level kind of stuff that I want to do after baseball.

I will probably wait till October to get into that again, do some pitching lessons, and then just get ready for next season."

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No matter what, it is going to be an interesting offseason for Herrmann. His strength, consistency, durability and ability to throw strikes are definitely key assets for him where even with average stuff he could be a solid backend of the rotation innings eater in the majors.

It is a big reason he will be considered for roster protection by the Indians this offseason from the Rule 5 Draft, and if they choose not to protect him why it is very likely another team will take a shot on him to fill a fifth starter spot for their major league club next year.

Whether he sticks with the Indians or ends up on another team this offseason via trade or the Rule 5 Draft, Herrmann has proven himself to be a quality depth starting pitching option and is poised to get a crack at a major league opportunity sometime next season.

Photo courtesy of the Cleveland Indians