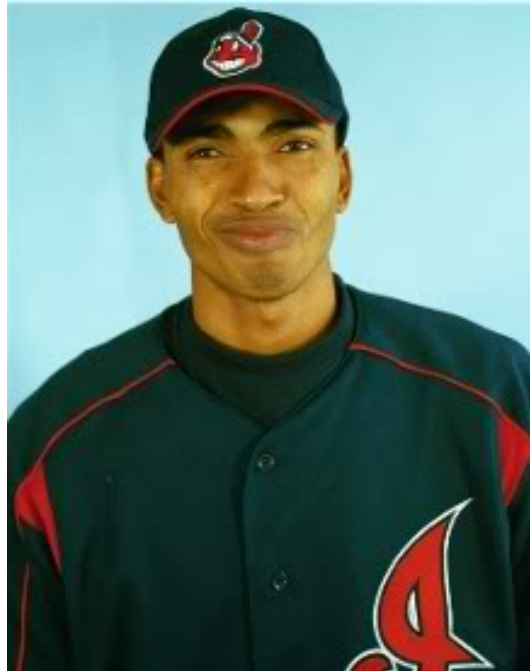


Minor Happenings: Perez Could Solve Left Handed Relief Need

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, May 24 2006 7:00 PM -

If you're like me and don't have time to follow all the Indians minor league teams on a daily basis, check Lastoria's weekly column out. In his weekly whirlwind through the Tribe farm system, Tony puts the spotlight on Rafael Perez, and also highlights Farm Director John Farrell's weekly radio interview.



(for games from Thursday May 18 through Wednesday May 24)

Player Profile:

Rafael Perez, Left-Handed Pitcher- Akron

Perez is a product of the Indians scouting efforts in the Latin American countries, as he signed as a free agent out of the Dominican Republic in 2002. In his first season in the Indians system in 2003, Perez was named the Appalachian League Pitcher of the Year after posting a 9-3 record with a 1.70 ERA and .220 BAA for short-season rookie level Burlington. His win total and ERA lead the league, while his innings pitched (69) were 2nd and strikeouts (63) ranked 5th.

He moved up a notch in 2004 to Lake County and went 7-6 with a 4.85 ERA in 22 starts. While some of his numbers were disappointing, he actually rebounded well from a disastrous start to his season. He started the season 0-5 in his first 9 starts, and did not win his first game until mid-June. He won 7 of his last 8 decisions (13 starts), and from July 3rd on that year he went 5-1 with a 3.00 ERA.

Perez really broke through last year, going a combined 12-8 with a 2.62 ERA at Kinston and Akron, with his 12 wins tying him for 3rd in the organization. He was

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mostly impressive at Akron, where he alone went 4-3 with a 1.76 ERA in 15 games. Of note, for the first time in his career he was used out of the bullpen and he was dominant, as in his seven relief appearances he posted a 1.26 ERA in 14.1 IP, and allowed only 11 hits and struck out 11. Situation-wise, at Akron left-handers hit only .133 (8 for 60) off of him, and overall batters only hit .143 off him with RISP. His performance last season was enough for the Indians to add him to the 40-man roster and protect him from the Rule 5 Draft.

This year, Perez is 3-4 with a 3.65 ERA with 43 strikeouts in 49.1 IP (9 starts) at Akron. In his first two starts (10.2 IP) he was 0-2 with an 8.44 ERA, but since then he is 3-2 with a 2.33 ERA in seven starts. Also, his dominance against lefties has continued as they are only hitting .190 with a .286 slugging percentage against him to date (righties are hitting .250 with a .400 slg%).

Currently, he is ranked as the Indians 13th best prospect by Baseball America. He is tall and lanky, and is still growing into his body, and as he fills out his frame he should increase the velocity on an already powerful 92-94 MPH live fastball with great action. His slider is rated as the best in the entire system, which many scouts feel will be a devastating pitch when he eventually is moved permanently to the bullpen. The Indians have a great need for left-handed relief pitching this year and beyond, and with how dominant he has been against lefties this season and in the past, he is someone to keep an eye on as the season rolls on.

Director's Cuts:

In his weekly interview, Indians Farm Director John Farrell again focused his attention mainly on players on the Buffalo roster.

On *Joe Inglett*: Both he and Kevin Kouzmanoff are 1st and 2nd in all of minor league baseball in batting average. Initially, his role will be as the 24th-25th player on a club. His consistent approach at the plate, versatility, and the progression he has shown at handling the shortstop position well will go a long way at opening up opportunities for him to make the Indians 25-man roster.

On *Kevin Kouzmanoff*: A solid defender who hits for average. He is not a 25+ home run a year player, but moreso an upper teens type home run hitter. He has a true understanding of the strike-zone, and has a simple approach at the plate and a very direct swing path. He is moving well and has fully recovered from his injury (back) that he sustained last season. He has opened some eyes in the

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organization in that he is still hitting over .400 two months into the season.

On *Andy Marte*: The source of Marte's problems at the plate is that he is over-swinging, which is a clear sign he is pressing. He consistently gets into good hitter's counts, but his mechanics at the plate continue to break down in these situations since he over-swings. The Indians have taken film of him from his days in the Atlanta organization and have broken it down to try and get his mechanics and swing straightened out.

On *Jason Stanford*: He is currently on an 80-pitch count at Buffalo, and coming off of Tommy John surgery the organization feels he is now 100% healthy. Going forward, the organization wants to work on him becoming more consistent with the execution of his pitches.

On *Danny Graves*: The Indians feel that what Graves really needs is consistent work to build up arm strength at Buffalo, and they will oblige by providing him with ample opportunities. The objective going forward in evaluating him will be to look for late sink and action on his pitches in the zone, which wasn't happening during his time in Cleveland.

On *Jeremy Sowers*: Sowers was briefly mentioned in closing, but Farrell stated that the most impressive thing with Sowers has been how his stuff and action on his pitches remains consistent from start to start.

Minor Transactions and Notes:

Buffalo (AAA): Since returning to Buffalo, Jeremy Guthrie has made two starts and not given up a run in those starts (10 IP). Guthrie has now not surrendered a run in four of his five starts this season, and has only allowed runs in just one of his 28 innings pitched for Buffalo.....Joe Inglett was called back up to Buffalo on Monday. In his four week stay at Akron as the everyday shortstop, he successfully proved he could handle the job. Back at Buffalo he will go back to a utility player role and continue to get exposure at several positions: 2B, SS, and CF....Infielder Jake Gautreau has been activated off the disabled list.

Akron (AA): After a brief stint at Buffalo, SS Ivan Ochoa and 2B Eider Torres have returned to Akron and will again be the starting 2B/SS duo for the Aeros....Tony Sipp has been activated from the disabled list, but will not return to the starting rotation. He is expected to pitch out the bullpen.....3B Kevin Kouzmanoff left last

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nights game with a tight hamstring. No word on whether or not this will keep him out of any games.

Kinston (A+): 1B Michael Aubrey was called up to Akron last week, while infielder Brandon Pinckney was returned to the K-Tribe....Relief pitcher Kyle Collins also returned to Kinston, and reliever Jesus Soto was sent to Lake County.

Lake County (A-): Highly touted outfield prospect John Drennen was activated off the disabled list last week....Catcher Chris Gimenez was placed on the disabled list last week with a ligament tear in his right thumb. The Indians transferred catcher Josh Roberts from the Mahoning Valley roster to take Gimenez's roster spot in Lake County....Right-hander reliever Mark Jecmen was placed on the disabled list Thursday with right shoulder inflammation.