

Written by {ga=consigliere}  
Monday, March 09 2009 7:00 PM -

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Our journey continues onward as we move into the Top 20 Prospects in the Indians farm system. And today, we start to get some names even casual followers of the Indians farm system will know. Guys that stand a pretty damn good chance of getting called up to the big league squad this year ... and a couple guys that are embroiled in battles for the last couple roster spots out of spring. Catcher Chris Jimenez has impressed in Goodyear, as has Luis Valbuena, who was acquired in the Franklin Gutierrez trade. Both players are profiled in today's five prospect profiles.



My [2009 Cleveland Indians Top 100 Prospects & More book](#) is now available. Click on the hyperlink for all the details, and to order it just go to [my website](#) and click on the form to the top right to complete the order with a check or credit card. If you wish to send a check or money order by US Mail, please contact me at [tlastoria@indiansprospectinsider.com](mailto:tlastoria@indiansprospectinsider.com) and I will verify the order and provide my full mailing address for you so send payment. ☐ ☐

We continue today with #20-16 in the Indians Top 100 Prospect Countdown. Here are the earlier rankings:

- 100. Brian Juhl (C)
- 99. Brad Hinkle (RHP)
- 98. Mark Thompson (SS)

97. Adam Davis (C/INF)
96. Adam White (OF)
95. Jerad Head (INF/OF)
94. Brock Simpson (1B/OF)
93. Ryan Blair (OF)
92. Dustin Realini (INF/OF)
91. Shawn Nottingham (LHP)
90. Cirilo Cumberbatch (OF)
89. Michael McGuire (RHP)
88. Sung-Wei Tseng (RHP)
87. David Roberts (RHP)
86. Jason Smit (INF)
85. Marty Popham (RHP)
84. Jose Constanza (OF)
83. Adam Abraham (INF)
82. Isaias Velasquez (2INF)
81. Gary Campfield (RHP)
80. Heath Taylor (LHP)
79. Rich Rundles (LHP)
78. Dallas Cawiezell (RHP)
77. Robbie Alcombrack (C)
76. Carlos Moncrief (RHP)
75. Nate Recknagel (C/1B)
74. Karexon Sanchez (INF)
73. Roman Pena (OF)
72. Kyle Landis (RHP)
71. John Drennen (OF)
70. Todd Martin (1B)
69. Santo Frias (RHP)
68. Michael Finocchi (RHP)

67. Kevin Rucker (OF)
66. Matt Meyer (LHP)
65. Bo Greenwell (OF)
64. Paolo Espino (RHP)
63. Jonathan Holt (RHP)
62. Vinnie Pestano (RHP)
61. Kevin Dixon (RHP)
60. Randy Newsom (RHP)
59. Chris Nash (1B)
58. Carlton Smith (RHP)
57. Lucas Montero (OF)
56. Steven Wright (RHP)
55. Michael Aubrey (1B)
54. Delvi Cid (OF)
53. Clayton Cook (RHP)
52. T.J. McFarland (LHP)
51. Wyatt Toregas (C)
50. Chris Jones (LHP)
49. Chen-Chang Lee (RHP)
48. Matt Brown (OF)
47. Ryan Edell (LHP)
46. Neil Wagner (RHP)
45. Danny Salazar (RHP)
44. Jared Goedert (2B/3B)
43. Josh Judy (RHP)
42. Jeremie Tice (3B)
41. Joey Mahalic (RHP)
40. Erik Stiller (RHP)
39. Ryan Morris (LHP)
38. Mike Pontius (RHP)

37. Ryan Miller (LHP)
36. Frank Herrmann (RHP)
35. Bryce Stowell (RHP)
34. Stephen Head (1B/OF)
33. Chuck Lofgren (LHP)
32. Trey Haley (RHP)
31. Rob Bryson (RHP)
30. Tim Fedroff (OF)
29. Matt McBride (C)
28. Eric Berger (LHP)
27. Alexander Perez (RHP)
26. Cord Phelps (2B)
25. Jeanmar Gomez (RHP)
24. Josh Rodriguez (SS/2B)
23. Zach Putnam (RHP)
22. Josh Tomlin (RHP)
21. Trevor Crowe (OF)

**20. Jordan Brown - First Baseman**

**Born: 12/18/1983 - Height: 6'0"; - Weight: 205 - Bats: Left -  
Throws: Left**

*(due to a formatting issue, Jordan Brown's stats are listed at the bottom of this page)*

## 2009 Indians Top Prospects: #20-16

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### 19. T.J. House - Left-handed Pitcher

Born: - Height: 6'2" - Weight: 215 - Bats: Left - Throws: Left

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2008	18	DNP	-	-



**History:** House was a 16th round pick in the 2008 Draft out of Picayune High School (MS). As a senior in high school last year, he went 7-2 with a 0.89 ERA and had 99 strikeouts and 25 walks. He also pitched out of the bullpen in qualifier action for Team USA in the summer of 2007, pitching only three innings while posting six strikeouts

and a .214 opponent batting average. He was slotted to go somewhere in the second to fifth rounds in the draft, but slipped because of the high pricetag he put on himself where he wanted \$1.5M to sign which ended up having many teams deem him as unsignable. He was committed to play college ball at Tulane University if he went unsigned, but the Indians swooped in at the signing deadline and he ended up taking less by signing for \$750,000.

**Strengths & Opportunities:** It is easy to see why the Indians like House so much and felt it necessary to sign him because even though he is raw he is very skilled and projectable as a pitcher. He is a physically advanced (6'2", 215 lbs) left hander with two plus pitches, a low 90s above average heavy fastball with good tailing action and an excellent slider in the mid 80s with depth and late break. He has very good arm strength to where his velocity should continue to increase as he matures. He also has a curve which is often confused with his slider, but may be dropped since it lacks much separation from his slider which really is more of a power slurve anyway. He has begun work on a changeup which is a work in progress. He mixes up his speeds and pitches well and has good command of the zone at an early age.

House has to learn how to pitch in professional baseball, but he has all the tools to develop rapidly. He already has sufficient "stuff" to become a late inning relief pitcher. While he has a smooth delivery, he needs to work on location and develop a change of speed pitch. Cleveland's left-handed pitching prospects in the upper levels are more finesse pitchers, but he is not of the same mold as he comes right after batters anywhere in the strike zone. He is very athletic and is a competitor, and along with his strong build and abilities he has been comped to Mike Hampton by publications such as Baseball America. In high school, he stayed in great shape during the offseason by participating on the swim team and helped them win a state championship in 2006.

**Outlook:** Right now House projects at least to be a middle of the rotation starter with the potential to be a top of the rotation starter if he learns to better command the zone and develop that third pitch. He will open the 2009 season in extended spring training and will pitch for one of the short-season league teams later in the summer. If he stays healthy, he could be in Cleveland as soon as 2012.

## 18. Chris Gimenez - Catcher

**Born: 12/27/1982 - Height: 6'2" - Weight: 190 - Bats: Right - Throws: Right**

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	G
2004	21	Mahoning Vv	A-	71
2005	22	Lake County	A	112

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2006	23	Lake County	A	91
2007	24	Kinston	A+	83
	24	Akron	AA	30
2008	25	Akron	AA	55
2008	25	Buffalo	AAA	54
		Career		496



**History:** Gimenez was drafted in the 19th round of the 2004 Draft out of the University of Nevada. After an impressive professional debut at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley in 2004, two freak injuries sidetracked his career where a severe staph infection in 2005 almost led to the amputation of his leg and in 2006 an injury to the ligament in his thumb while sliding into second base sidelined him several months. His power was put on display where he won the Home Run Derby at the 2007 Carolina League All Star Game.

**Strengths & Opportunities:** Gimenez is an athletic player who can play all over the field and do a lot of things. Without any injury setbacks the past two seasons, he has resurrected himself as a top hitting prospect in the system with very good power potential. He is a physically imposing specimen, and with his chiseled physique arguably may be the strongest player in the Indians system. He is one of the best makeup guys in the system, and his success the last two years has been the result of a lot of hard work in the cages. Last season he made a conscientious effort to focus on being more selective at the plate to allow him to get into better hitter's counts and improve his on-base percentage with more walks. His much improved plate discipline was helped by the Indians winter development program held at Progressive Field last January where after listening to instructors, coaches, front office personnel, and guest speakers it helped him adopt better strike-zone awareness and a penchant for drawing walks. Because of this hard work, his walk-rate has improved a lot to where he had the best walk-rate in the system last season.

In 2006, Gimenez was converted to a catcher, and the move to catcher has sort of made him a jack-of-all-trades in that he can play virtually anywhere on the field except the middle at center field, shortstop and second base. By concentrating just on catching it will allow him to better pick up the nuances of the game from behind the plate, and also help him maintain consistency when he steps into the batters box. From the start of spring training last year, he put a lot of extra work in before games with catching coordinator Tim Laker working on his mechanics, leaning with a pitch, and receiving the ball. He 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. He has worked on has transfer-and-throw since he has more of an outfielder's throwing motion and it needed shortening up. He is extremely strong and durable with the ability to handle injuries and blows at the catching position, and he is a natural leader and has no problem taking charge in a clubhouse or game. While the Indians are committed to developing him as a catcher and believe he can handle the position, his best position is third base.

Gimenez still needs to work on staying down through the ball with his swing to generate more backspin when he connects. He has the tendency to get the bat in the right position, but he generates a lot of topspin because he does not follow through with his swing path which leads to him cutting it off and rotating his shoulders. If he starts to consistently generate more backspin on his hits, his home run and double totals will surely increase. He has done well in his conversion to catcher, and the final thing for him is to get more consistent throwing to second base to make sure that he can keep control of a running game. He also needs more work and experience with his game calling like reading swings and realizing when his pitcher does not have his best stuff.

**Outlook:** When he has been healthy, Gimenez has put up some very good numbers at the plate and proven to be very valuable. His toughness, durability, and skill with the bat is very intriguing. He has more than made a name for himself in a utility role, and now that he is on the 40-man roster - because of that versatility and his powerful bat - he could be a very valuable bench option for the Indians as a super utility player sometime this coming season or in 2010. He should open the 2009 season in Triple-A Columbus.

## 17. Luis Valbuena - Second Baseman

**Born: 11/30/1985 - Height: 5'10" - Weight: 200 - Bats: Left - Throws: Right**

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	G
2003	17	Aquirre	RR	50
2004	18	Aquirre	RR	61
2005	19	Everett	A-	74
	19	Tacoma	AAA	3
2006	20	Wisconsin	A	89

## 2009 Indians Top Prospects: #20-16

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2007	20	Inland Emp	A+	43
2008	21	West Tenn	AA	122
	22	West Tenn	AA	70
	22	Tacoma	AAA	58
	22	Seattle	MLB	18
	23	Career		570



**History:** Valbuena was signed as an undrafted free agent out of Venezuela in August 2002 by the Seattle Mariners, and the Indians acquired him from the Mariners as part of a three team deal on December 10, 2008. He just turned 23 years old on November 30<sup>th</sup>

, and after a down year in 2007 he had a sensational 2008 campaign splitting time between Double-A, Triple, and the majors to put his name back on the prospect map finishing with career highs in several categories namely batting average, on-base percentage, and slugging percentage. In addition to his career numbers, Valbuena had a very good performance in the Venezuela Winter League where he hit .291 with 5 HR, 20 RBI and had an .862 OPS in 49 games. In a strange coincidence his keystone combination in Venezuela was shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera.

**Strengths & Opportunities:** Valbuena's biggest upside as a player is his bat, which is the main reason the Indians acquired him. He has a good approach at the plate, and has demonstrated good bat-to-ball ability with a quick bat with a nice line-drive stroke. He is not intimidated by anyone when he steps into the box and profiles as a top of the order hitter because of his ability to work counts, never give away an at bat, take walks, make consistent contact and showcase decent speed. Coming into last season he had shown the ability to control the strike zone throughout his minor league career from 2005-2007 with a 192-138 strikeout to walk ratio (1.4:1) and 6.3 AB/K ratio, and showed an improvement with his approach last season with a 6.6 AB/K ratio and

69-59 strikeout to walk ratio (1.2:1). He currently has doubles power and is a gap hitter, but he continues to get stronger which is a reason he saw his power numbers improve last year. While he is only considered an average runner, his overall game and ability has often been compared to Ray Durham and his physical look is a lot like Juan Uribe.

Valbuena has a reputation as being more of an offensive player, but he has dedicated himself the past few seasons in improving his defense. The fruits of his labor started to show last season as Seattle officials raved about his improvement on defense. He has now pushed himself up to a fringe above-average defensive second baseman that makes all the routine plays while displaying very good range, a strong arm, and the ability to make consistent, accurate throws. He works well around the bag showing good footwork and is mechanically sound turning the double play especially with his quick pivot. With his offensive and defensive skills, he should end up at worst as an average big league second baseman.

That said, Valbuena lacks really any versatility to play another position - much in the same vein as Josh Barfield - so at this point the only way he will make a roster is as a starter at second base and not as a bench option unless he is in some sort of platoon with another player at the position. There is also some concern about his body because of his very stocky build which could give him some problems with his weight down the road, but so far this has not been an issue for him.

**Outlook:** Valbuena's acquisition fills a huge void in the middle infield in the upper levels of the Indians minor league system. At the moment, after the acquisition of Mark DeRosa to fill out the big league infield, the plan for Valbuena is to open the season as the everyday second baseman in Triple-A Columbus. He still needs to be polished off, and has some development and upside left, but he provides the Indians good middle infield depth for this season and beyond and could potentially become the starting second baseman by the middle of the 2009 season.

## 16. Tony Sipp - Left-handed Pitcher

**Born: 07/12/1983 - Height: 6'0" - Weight: 190 - Bats: Left - Throws: Left**

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2004	20	Mahoning Vv	A-	3
2005	21	Lake County	A	4
	21	Kinston	A+	2
2006	22	Akron	AA	4
2007	23	DNP	-	0
2008	24	GCL Indians	R	0
	24	Kinston	A+	0

24

Akron  
Career

AA

0  
13

**History:** The Indians selected Sipp in the 45th round of the 2004 Draft out of Clemson University. The pick was a gamble by the Indians, as Sipp had only pitched in 22 career college games and many felt he would be too costly to sign. But, the Indians found a diamond in the rough and after he impressed the Indians in the Cape Cod League they gladly paid him an unheard of \$130,000 for a 45th rounder to sign.

**Strengths & Opportunities:** Sipp is a power-armed pitcher who has an impressive three-pitch arsenal. His stuff is big-time, fronted by a plus fastball and plus-plus slider that both grade out as out pitches at the major league level. His fastball has good movement and consistently sits in the 91-94 MPH range, although his quick arm action and excellent deception makes it look a lot faster. He is still developing a changeup and has a good feel for it, and even though he just started throwing it when he came into the organization the Indians feel it may end up being his best pitch. With the changeup, hitters can't sit on his slider and fastball, and the development of his changeup has pushed him into the upper echelon of elite relief prospects in the minors.

With three very good pitches, a player of Sipp's caliber would normally project as a starter, but the Indians love his potential as a dominant late-inning reliever. He gets a lot of swing and misses with all three of his pitches, and his deception in his delivery troubles right-handers who have a hard time picking up the ball out of his hand. He does not have a traditional left-handed delivery since he is a little bit open and therefore really attacks lefties and righties the same. He is also extremely athletic, and his athleticism allows him to consistently repeat his delivery well. He is very aggressive on the mound, and has amazing

aptitude.

Sipp's career has been sidetracked the last two years as he did not pitch in 2007 after experiencing discomfort in his left elbow near the end of spring training and was shutdown for the first half of the season. An MRI in July 2007 found the UCL was no longer strained or even torn, but that he had a fracture near his UCL as it had pulled at the bone in his elbow that it was attached to until it eventually fractured which happens when the ligament is too strong or the bone too weak. He underwent Tommy John surgery in July 2007 and followed that up with a rigorous 11-month rehab and was back in game action in June 2008. He was pain free and spent the rest of the 2008 season on a very restricted throwing program. By the end of the season his return from Tommy John surgery had gone well as his velocity was back in the low 90s and he was touching 94 MPH with no setbacks or any pain. He came back stronger, pitched really well, and performed a lot better than the Indians expected him to.

Sipp was very close to 100% when the season ended, but early in the offseason reportedly started experiencing some discomfort in his shoulder which concerned the Indians enough to shut him down and they will re-evaluate him once he reports to spring training. If the shoulder issue is not serious and he is good to go once spring training starts, Sipp should be 100% with the elbow and completely recovered from the Tommy John surgery and be able to throw without any restrictions in 2009. He needs to prove he can stay healthy, as in addition to the elbow surgery and looming shoulder issue, he also missed two months in 2006 with an oblique injury and left elbow inflammation. Also, while he has made great strides with the changeup, he still is working on maintaining consistent command with it. He also is a little undersized, and lacks pinpoint control.

**Outlook:** Sipp's elbow injury really came at a bad time for him and the Indians in that he probably would have already made his major league debut and would be a fixture in the Indians big league bullpen by now. The Indians made some moves in the offseason to bolster their big league bullpen, but if Sipp is healthy he could factor into the big league bullpen mix by the middle of the season. He will open the 2009 season in the Triple-A Columbus bullpen.

*Photos courtesy of Ken Carr except for T.J. House photo courtesy of Team USA Baseball*

**Up Next: #15-11**

**Jordan Brown Stats:**

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	G
2005	21	Mahoning Vv	A-	19
2006	22	Kinston	A+	125

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2007	23	Akron	AA	127
2008	24	Buffalo	AAA	109
		Career		380