

## 2009 Indians Top Prospects: #10-6

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Tuesday, March 17 2009 7:00 PM -

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We're down to the best of the best, the creme de la creme. The Indians ten most prized prospects in their minor league organization. Guys that figure to make an impact with the big league team, some this year, some in future years. And names that almost all Indians fans will know and recognize. Included are big time 3B prospect Wes Hodges, and also the Indians top selections from the last two drafts ... Beau Mills and Lonnie Chisenhall. Be sure to keep an eye out early next week for Tony's Top Five.



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 #10-6 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 (1B)
19. T.J. House (LHP)
18. Chris Gimenez (C)
17. Luis Valbuena (2B)
16. Tony Sipp (LHP)
15. Abner Abreu (3B)
14. Jon Meloan (RHP)
13. Scott Lewis (LHP)
12. Michael Brantley (OF)
11. Carlos Rivero (SS)

**10. Wes Hodges - Third Baseman**

**Born: 09/14/1984 - Height: 6'2" - Weight: 205 - Bats: Right - Throws: Right**

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Year	Age	Team	Lvl	G
2007	22	Kinston	A+	104
2008	23	Akron	AA	133
		Career		237



**History:** Hodges was a 2nd round pick by the Indians in the 2006 Draft out of Georgia Tech. He would have been taken higher in the draft if he did not have some injury concerns. Going into 2006, he was ranked as a preseason Top 10 college draft prospect and surefire first round pick, but that ranking took a hit when he came down with a stress fracture in his left leg. He basically played on one leg for almost all of his final season at Georgia Tech and finished up hitting .329 with 11 HR and 68 RBI in 219 at bats. He fell on draft day, and the Indians gambled and selected him with their third of four second round picks. They signed him for \$1 million and to a 2007 contract to hold him out of action the rest of the season and give him more time to mend from the injury. In 2007, Baseball America tabbed Hodges as the best power prospect and best defensive third baseman in the Carolina League. Last year, he was named the 2008 Eastern League Rookie of the Year at Double-A Akron, and he also played for the U.S. team in the Futures Game at Yankee Stadium. His 97 RBI last season at Akron also broke the single-season record formerly held by Chan Perry who had 96 RBI in 1997.

**Strengths & Opportunities:** Hodges is a player who was born to hit. He is a very disciplined hitter with great bat-to-ball ability, and has a nice, short line drive stroke that allows him to cover the whole plate with good power potential to all fields. He has shown the ability to make plenty of hard contact, and has no trouble catching up to good fastballs. He has become more relaxed at the plate and is learning to look for certain pitches early in the count. Since coming into the organization he has made several adjustments at the plate which have helped him become a better hitter, such as shortening his swing and simplifying his

approach at the plate. He worked with Kinston hitting coach Jon Nunnally in 2007 and tinkered with his swing mechanics by learning to cock his hands back into a pre-loaded position by his right shoulder and use his legs as a timing mechanism to shift load in his bat.

His strong offensive performance in 2008 was a result of finally being 100% healthy in his lower half where he had full use of his legs. In addition to that he has become better at recognizing pitches, understanding how pitchers are attacking him, and making good adjustments at bat to at bat. The Indians feel he is one of the most intelligent hardworking baseball players in the system and a true student of the game. His aptitude is off the charts and he has an unbelievable ability to make adjustments. He is very professional and is very committed. He has no fear and is not intimidated by expectations.

For the most part Hodges has remained healthy during his time with the Indians. He did miss about three to four weeks of action the first half of the 2007 season at Single-A Kinston with a bad hamstring and broken toe in his foot, but other than that he has been able to stay on the field and so far erase the injury concerns teams had with him going into draft day. He is about as consistent as you can get as far as production goes as he never had less than 17 RBI or more than 21 RBI in any month last season. He did seem to wear down some in the second half as he hit .315 with an .862 OPS in 91 games before the All Star break, but in 41 games after the break hit just .238 with a .728 OPS.

As a defender, Hodges is rough around the edges at third base. He has good hands and a strong arm, but has displayed questionable range and ability to come in on groundballs. He sort of regressed some at third base last year at Double-A Akron, but the feeling by those in the game is he can rebound and become solid defensively and the arm is good enough to handle the position. It is just a matter of getting a little experience. His hip flexors are tight, which hinders him at times to get down low on groundballs. So, this offseason he committed to an offseason strength and conditioning program where he took 15 pounds of weight off. He spent a lot of time working out and doing Yoga to slim down and become more flexible so he could improve defensively. As a result, his lateral quickness has improved, and he is moving a lot better at third base and shown improvement overall as a defender at third base.

His bat profiles at first or third base, but his defense should play enough to allow him to stay at third. His body continues to get better and more firm and along with that his agility and mobility have improved. With more focused attention on his defense, he is expected to be at least an average defensive third baseman in the big leagues. His success as a hitter needs to carry over to the defensive end, as he did have 28 errors at third base for Double-A Akron last year. He suffered from some arm fatigue late in the season which resulted in some throwing errors. Also,

with the adjustments the Indians made with his footwork and throwing it resulted in a lot of errors as he applied the changes made by coaches. While he encouraged the Indians with the strides he made at improving his defense in the Arizona Fall League this offseason, they still want to see him improve his footwork and timing, primarily his first step quickness at third base and coming in on balls. Offensively, he needs to continue applying his relaxed, patient approach at the plate and get better at learning to recognize and hit changeups and breaking balls and lay off them early in the count. He needs to continue thinking down and through the ball and use his legs more in his swing to help create more line drives.

**Outlook:** The Indians like Hodges athleticism at third base, and combined with his very advanced and professional bat feel he is a rare find. There is no question he is a very gifted player offensively and is very close to being major league ready, but unless they are desperate the Indians are likely to leave him in the minors all season to finish him off defensively and be ready to compete for a big league job in spring training 2010. If he can continue to hit and make some improvements defensively at third base to become a consistent solid-average defender, third base should be his job in Cleveland by the start of 2010 or even the end of 2009. He will open the 2009 season at Triple-A Columbus.

## 9. Lonnie Chisenhall - Third Baseman

**Born: 10/04/1988 - Height: 6'1" - Weight: 200 - Bats: Left -**

**Throws: Right**

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	G
2008	19	Mahoning Vy	A-	68



**History:** Chisenhall was a 1st round pick in the 2008 Draft out of Pitt Junior College. Chisenhall signed quickly after the draft by agreeing to a \$1.1 million bonus. He played his freshman season in 2007 for the University of South Carolina (20 games, .313, 1 HR, 13 RBI), but was kicked off the baseball team in March 2007 because of burglary and grand larceny charges. He plead guilty to the charges and received six months probation, and transferred to Pitt Junior College in 2008 where he hit .410 (68-for-166) with 27 doubles, 8 homers and 66 RBI. He also drew 38 walks and struck out just 8 times all season.

**Strengths & Opportunities:** Chisenhall is a very intelligent baseball player who is very gifted and loves to play. He is a line drive gap-to-gap hitter with a very patient, polished approach to hitting and plus bat speed. He has a very good swing plane, is quiet in the box, and is short to the ball. He shows good command of the strike zone and puts up some quality at bats against left-handed pitchers. He has unbelievable poise for his age and is a clutch performer. The Indians love his youth and tools, and feel with his hitting approach and ability at the plate he has a chance to develop more power in the future. As a runner, he has average speed.

At only 19 years of age, Chisenhall held up well in the NY-Penn League last year where most players are 21 to 22 years of age. He did a great job of making adjustments at the plate, touching up opposing pitchers who tried to work him inside, and when they started pitching him away he countered by making the proper adjustment of going with what they were giving him and going the other way. He is also still adjusting to wood bats. He was supposed to play in the Cape Cod League to get some experience with wood bats, but decided not to so his time in Mahoning Valley last year was his first experience in games using a wood bat. As he continues to adjust to wood bats and grows into his body the Indians really believe the home runs will come especially once he learns to stay inside the ball a little more.

A lot of the focus with Chisenhall going forward will be what to do with him from a position standpoint. When the Indians drafted him, they selected him with the idea that he would continue to play shortstop his first year in the organization and then move to third base in 2009 after they had time with him in Instructional League and a full offseason to work on the transition. The Indians did not burden Chisenhall with the position move right out of the gates mostly to just allow him to go out and play last year and not make too many changes at once. But, according to comments from Mahoning Valley manager Travis Fryman and Farm Director Ross Atkins it now looks like there is a strong possibility that Chisenhall could stay at shortstop in 2009 because of how impressed they were with his defense at shortstop last season. The Indians were excited with the ability and athleticism he showed at shortstop and he showed improvement with his footwork, range and his throwing.

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At this time, no official move has been made and likely will not be known until spring training. If he does not stick at shortstop, the Indians believe he has the skills and tools which should allow for an easy transition for him to third base. To help him with the transition from shortstop to third base, Fryman will be a perfect mentor since he himself went through the same position change as a player. Whether or not Chisenhall stays at shortstop or slides to third base, he still has to work on his throwing as he tends to be erratic at times, mostly because of a bad habit of double pumping before he throws the ball. He actually profiles as an offensive second baseman and could end up there down the road, but at this time he is not being considered there because of his very good throwing arm which is best used on the left side of the infield.

**Outlook:** Chisenhall admits he made a terrible mistake with the burglary charges in college which was an isolated incident, and he is now focusing on getting his baseball career going and sort of leaving that experience in the past. He is expected to take the traditional path where he plays at Lake County and then Kinston, and from there his performance will start to dictate where he belongs. There is a lot of upside in Chisenhall's left-handed bat, and he could be a good one. Fryman expressed a lot of confidence in Chisenhall as a shortstop, which may ultimately lead to him staying there at least for another year where it looks like he could be the starting shortstop in 2009 at Single-A Lake County.

(Note, since this was originally written Chisenhall has been officially moved to third base)

### 8. Beau Mills - First Baseman

**Born: 08/15/1986 - Height: 6'2" - Weight: 220 - Bats: Left - Throws: Right**

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	G
2007	20	Mahoning Vv	A-	8
	20	Lake County	A	44
2008	20	Kinston	A+	10
	21	Kinston	A+	125
		Career		

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### 7. Hector Rondon - Right-handed Pitcher

Born: 02/26/1988 - Height: 6'3" - Weight: 180 - Bats: Right - Throws: Right

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2005	17	DSL Indians	R	3
2006	18	GCL Indians	R	3
2007	19	Lake County	A	7
2008	20	Kinston	A+	11
		Career		24



**History:** Rondon was signed as a non-drafted free agent out of Venezuela in August of 2004. In 2007 at Single-A Lake County he took part in one of two no-hitters for the team on the year, throwing six no-hit innings while striking out five and combining with two other pitchers to throw a no-hitter in early July 2007. He was also selected to the World Team last year in the Futures Game which took place at Yankee Stadium as part of Major League baseball's All Star celebration. He dominated the Carolina League, a league where at 20-years old he was almost three years younger than the league average, finishing 4th in wins (11), 8th in ERA (3.60), 6th in starts (27), 6th in innings pitched (145.0), 3rd in WHIP (1.19), and 2nd in strikeouts (145).

**Strengths & Opportunities:** Rondon is a young and projectable starting pitcher with power, aggression and puts the ball on the plate. His fastball has good life and consistently clocks in at 92-94 MPH and has topped out as high as 96 MPH. He has an ability to attack hitters, and has a lot of confidence in his fastball to where he struck out a batter an inning last season at advanced Single-A Kinston. Not only does he have enough velocity to challenge with a power pitch, but has also flashed a lot of touch and feel for finesse when it is needed. His slider used to be more of a show pitch, but has come a long way and is becoming more of a nasty weapon that he can consistently throw for strikes low and away to right-handers. He also throws a curveball that has the potential in the future to be an average breaking ball, and a straight changeup that showed improvement last year.

At 6'3" and 180 pounds, Rondon is long and lanky and has plenty of projection still with his body. He has shown the ability to mix up his pitches well, and showed plus control with the ability to throw strikes and locate his pitches well to both sides of the plate. He is a competitor on the mound and very aggressive with his fastball where he likes to challenge hitters. He often gets himself into good counts, and continues to get more consistent with making his pitches and get stronger. He has a good plan when he takes the mound, sticks with it, and shows good tempo. He has shown very good durability as he made every scheduled start at advanced Single-A Kinston last season, and has not missed a start in any previous season. He shows a very good work ethic.

Rondon went into last season as a prospect on the rise with some good potential, and by the end of the season was one of the biggest breakthrough prospects in the system. The overnight change for him was a result of Indians coaches working with his delivery and challenging him to be more aggressive throwing his offspeed pitches for strikes. Early in the season last year he battled with the command of his curveball and changeup, but after a lot of work in bullpen sessions with Kinston pitching coach Greg Hibbard his fastball command improved and his secondary pitches became much sharper. His confidence also steadily increased as a result. Once he started throwing his secondary pitches for strikes his fastball fed off of that and it made him much tougher to hit. The combination of his improved

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slider and changeup as well as fastball command allowed him to get more swing and misses with his fastball.

One of the big developments for Rondon which has shot him up the prospect charts is not only his age-related performance last year, but a significant spike in his average fastball velocity from 88-90 MPH early in the season to an above average fastball velocity late in the season of 92-94 to where it was topping out at 96 MPH at the end of the season. His velocity spiked and became more consistent by learning to better repeat his delivery, keep the ball down in the zone, and controlling his effort level. He also showed the ability to stay strong late into games as his velocity showed the same life hitting 93-94 MPH in the sixth inning of his starts which is a sign of really starting to get in a groove with his delivery. The Indians actually think his fastball velocity could still continue to increase as he grows into his body and improves his mechanics.

Rondon loves to compete with the fastball on the plate almost too much, so the Indians have challenged him to throw more changeups and use his secondary pitches more. He is also continuing to work on solidifying his delivery since he tends to get a little sloppy at times with it. He has shown problems working out of the stretch as when men were on base he struggled at times to get hitters out. He needs to work on getting stronger out of the stretch, and also fine tune his delivery so he can create more deception. Overall, if he wants to stay a starter he needs to continue putting on good weight so his body can handle the heavy workload as a starting pitcher.

**Outlook:** Rondon has grown a lot as a pitcher in the last two seasons and has a good ceiling that is not even close to being reached. It is still really hard to tell exactly what he will be because he is so young, but he currently projects as a solid #3 or #4 starter at the major league level. That said, there is certainly room for him to grow and become more of a front of the rotation starter considering prior to the 2008 season he was viewed more of a #5 or depth starter for a major league organization. He is part of a young Latin Trifecta of him, Kelvin De La Cruz, and Jeanmar Gomez that has the Indians excited and is steadily moving up in the system. He should open the season in the Double-A Akron starting rotation.

## 6. Kelvin De La Cruz - Left-handed Pitcher

**Born: 08/01/1988 - Height: 6'5" - Weight: 187 - Bats: Left - Throws: Left**

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2005	16	DSL Indians	DSL	3
2006	17	GCL Indians	GCL	1
2007	18	GCL Indians	GCL	3
		Mahoning Valley	A-	2

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2008	19	Lake County	A	8
	19	Kinston	A+	3
	19	Akron	AA	1
		Career		21



**History:** De La Cruz was signed as a non-drafted free agent out of the Dominican Republic in December of 2004. He is often referred to as "Carmona Left" because of his close resemblance to current Indians right-handed starting pitcher Fausto Carmona. Not only does De La Cruz look a lot like him on the mound with his size and build and is from the Dominican Republic, but his skills, pitching repertoire, makeup and so on are near identical to what Carmona was like back in 2003 when he was at Single-A Lake County. He is also very good friends with Carmona and often asks him for insight into the professional game and lifestyle.

**Strengths & Opportunities:** Confidence has never been an issue with De La Cruz as he loves to compete. He is a high ceiling lefty who pitches with his fastball and has a good feel for all three of his pitches with the ability to throw all three in the zone. He gets good sink and pounds his fastball down in the zone. In the last two years he has shown much improved arm strength as his fastball velocity jumped from 84-86 MPH in 2006 to 88-92 MPH in 2007 to where it sat at 91-93 MPH last season in Single-A Lake County. His fastball velocity still could increase because of his young age and he is still getting bigger and stronger. He complements his fastball with a curveball and changeup. The curveball is a 12-6 hammer and a projectable plus-plus pitch with real good depth and a swing and miss put away type pitch. He has a feel for his changeup, and it projects to be a plus pitch too.

De La Cruz has the size, the pitches, and the intelligence to grow a lot

in the coming years where as he matures he will better fill out his big frame. He has proven to be very durable and projects as a middle of the rotation starter, and because he has the potential to add more velocity and develop more he could potentially be a front end starter. At 6'5" he is a very tall kid who gets good leverage on hitters by using his height to get the ball on a downward plane. He shows a no fear aggressive approach on the mound where he challenges hitters and pounds the strike zone. He is a smart pitcher who has an understanding on how to attack hitters and stick to his strengths. Even for his size, he displays very good athleticism and fields his position well by handling all the bunts and comebackers, and even while shagging during batting practice he shows off his athleticism by running down balls in the outfield. He has good attention to detail, and is a student of the game. He is also very passionate about baseball and is doing a good job making the cultural transition to the US from the Dominican Republic.

De La Cruz still has a long way to go. After dominating at Lake County, the Indians pushed him up to advanced Single-A Kinston in July just before his 20th birthday. While he had a few rough outings at Kinston, the Indians were impressed with his performance and felt he competed well and was often the victim of some poor defensive play behind him. Being young, his fastball command is still not there yet which leads to an issue with walks, so the main focus with him this upcoming season will be on improving his command so he can throw strikes more consistently. He needs to continue refining his control and command of his pitches so that he can setup hitters to get themselves out as he moves up the minor league ladder. He needs more work on being more consistent with repeating his delivery. While he is a great person and teammate, he needs some work on his in-game attitude by controlling his emotions better and not letting things that are out of his control like errors affect him. He also tends to lose focus at times, and if he is able to get better at maintaining his focus throughout the game he is going to be a pitcher to reckon with.

**Outlook:** De La Cruz has a promising future because he is young, strong and powerful. He has the talent and intangibles to grow a lot the next few seasons and has a chance to be really good in the near future and move into the upper echelon of starting pitchers in the minors. As a side note, he would actually get a lot more pub and be ranked higher in other places if they were aware that he was actually born on August 1, 1988 (08/01/1988) and not the incorrect date of January 8, 1988 (01/08/1988) which is a typo in every non-Indians publication that lists his vitals. That incorrect date is big in that they think he pitched at age 20 in the South Atlantic League last year when he was really only 19 years old. In any case, 2008 was his breakout campaign, and 2009 could be the sequel that firmly establishes him in that upper echelon of left-handed starters in the minors. He should open the 2009 season at advanced Single-A Kinston, but should see some time at Double-A Akron at some point this season.

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*Photos courtesy of Ken Carr except Hector Rondon photo courtesy of Carl Kline*

**Up Next: #5-1**