

2009 Indians Top Prospects: #5-1

Written by {ga=consigliere}
Monday, March 23 2009 7:00 PM -

Our long off-season journey finally comes to an end today as we conclude Tony's super Top 100 Prospects series with his five most elite prospects in the Indians farm system. Two of the five players were acquired in trades last season. The other three were the Indians first round selections in the 2003, 2005, and 2006 drafts. And all five of these players not only project as major league players, but impactful ones. Also ... Tony heads out to Goodyear Thursday for the final ten days of camp and we'll be running some daily updates from him out there.



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 and I will verify the order and provide my full mailing address for you so send payment.

Today, we wrap up the Indians Top 100 list with #1-5. Later this week, I will have one final piece wrapping up the series and explaining some of the rankings.

Also, as an FYI, I will be flying out to Goodyear, AZ on Thursday and will be there the final ten days of camp. Starting Saturday, I will have a daily notebook I will be posting here at TheClevelandFan.com, SportsTimeOhio.com and my blog at www.indiansprospectinsider.com.

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)

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Monday, March 23 2009 7:00 PM -

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)

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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 (3B)
9. Lonnie Chisenhall (3B)
8. Beau Mills (1B)
7. Hector Rondon (RHP)
6. Kelvin De La Cruz (LHP)

5. David Huff - Left-handed Pitcher

Born: 08/22/1984 - Height: 6'2" - Weight: 190 - Bats: Switch - Throws: Left

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Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2006	21	Mahoning Vy	A-	0
2007	22	Kinston	A+	4
2008	23	Akron	AA	5
	23	Buffalo	AAA	6
		Career		15



History: Huff was a supplemental 1st round pick and the first player the Indians selected in the 2006 Draft out of UCLA. An unknown fact about him is he was a switch hitter in high school, which shows his athletic ability. Coming off a strained UCL in 2007, he had an innings threshold of 150 innings that the Indians held him to last year. Because he was so strong and pitched so many innings the first half of the season, he was on pace to go well over the threshold, so he was limited to five innings a start for the last two months of the season. This is also a big reason he was never called up to Cleveland last September.

Strengths & Opportunities: Huff is in the upper echelon of left-handed starting pitchers in the minors, and has good potential as a middle of the rotation starter in the big leagues. He throws a fastball, curveball, slider and changeup, with the fastball velocity consistently clocking in at 90-93 MPH and has topped out as high as 94 MPH. He is a strike-thrower and has excellent command of all his pitches, and has the best fastball command in the entire Indians system. His fastball plays up because of his devastating plus changeup. His changeup is his money pitch and a legitimate weapon against lefties and righties. He displays just as much confidence in his changeup as he does his fastball, and is able to throw it in any count or situation. Last year his slider developed into an effective breaking pitch he can use against left-handers. The slider is firm with good depth and is now the third plus pitch in his arsenal and a potential out pitch at the next level. He mixes in a 12-6 curveball which is real sharp and has a lot of depth to it, but is mostly used as a show-me pitch.

Huff has a veteran attack plan and is all about command, movement and velocity. While he does not overpower hitters, he has unbelievable confidence and a very good feel for his fastball which he commands well to both sides of the plate and to the corners on all four quadrants. He

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is aggressive and attacks hitters, and he has a great, athletic delivery which deceives hitters and he repeats very well. He is a pitcher you like to watch pitch because he is smart and knows how to pitch by moving the ball around in and out, gets the breaking ball and changeup over and knows how to use them, and he constantly makes adjustments to hitters in game by reading their swings. He also does a good job of being consistent around the zone. He is a very polished, confident mentally tough pitcher who has answered every challenge and has shown the ability to pitch in big games and pitch out of tight situations.

Huff is often compared to the likes of Tom Glavine, Barry Zito and Jeremy Sowers, which is a pretty broad range of finesse left-handed pitchers, but he also shows some flashes of a Cliff Lee and Cole Hamels because of how he attacks hitters with a low 90s fastball to both sides of the plate and has a very good secondary pitch with the ability to strike people out. While his velocity is very much like Indians left-handed starter Cliff Lee where it plays up some because of some deception in his delivery, the Indians feel his best comp is Glavine because the way they pitch, pound the zone with their fastball, and command the baseball is very similar.

Huff knows how to pitch and is very smart, and really had a consistent season last year with very few rough outings. Over the course of the 2008 season he continued to hone in on his mechanics and make sure he is more cognizant of when his mechanics start to drift a little. He has made adjustments with his body and shows a strong commitment to professionalism. While there was a scare for him and the Indians when he hurt his elbow in 2007, he came back well and has proven to be extremely strong and durable before and after the injury. There is not much to nitpick about with Huff, but he does need to get better at finishing hitters off. Many times last season he had hitters down in the count 0-2 or 1-2, but often gave up a hit in that count or let them battle back to work a hit or walk. He has been throwing too many pitches to hitters and giving them too many opportunities to see his stuff. He also has a tendency to cast his curveball at times. The Indians would like to see Huff shore up his approach in this regard and be even more aggressive in going right after hitters and let them get themselves out. He needs to pitch to his strengths and not try to be so fine with his pitches at times. He needs to continue to keep his mechanics sharp by hitting his balance point and using his back leg with a little bit of bend to really drive off the rubber towards home plate and get full extension.

Outlook: Huff has enjoyed a lot of success in his baseball career after competing and dominating at a very high level in college, putting up a good showing in 2007 at advanced Single-A Kinston and the Arizona Fall League, and then having a fantastic year in 2008 at Double-A Akron and Triple-A Buffalo. It is about his stuff, delivery and his command, and he is about as close to being major league ready as you can get. He should open the season in the Triple-A Columbus rotation and gives the Indians viable major league starting depth in 2009 and should be a fixture in the rotation very soon, perhaps by opening day if he impresses and has a great spring training camp.

4. Adam Miller - Right-handed Pitcher

Born: 11/26/1984 - Height: 6'4" - Weight: 200 - Bats: Right - Throws: Right

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2003	18	Burlington	R	0
2004	19	Lake County	A	7
	19	Kinston	A+	3
2005	20	Mahoning Vy	A-	0
	20	Kinston	A+	2
2006	21	Akron	AA	15

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2007	21	Buffalo	AAA	0
2008	22	Buffalo	AAA	5
	23	Buffalo	AAA	0
		Career		32



History: Miller was a 1st round pick by the Indians in the 2003 Draft out of McKinney High School (TX). Prior to signing with the Indians, he had a commitment to play for the University of Arizona. Miller's 15 wins at Double-A Akron in 2006 set a franchise record, passing Paul Byrd's 1992 franchise record of 14 wins in a season. His 161 strikeouts also crushed the single-season team record of 149, which was set by Travis Driskill in 1996. He was named the Eastern League Pitcher of the Year in 2006. In 2007, Sports Illustrated magazine named him to their "Dream Rotation" which is an up-and-coming dream five-man rotation compiled by 11 high-ranking major-league executives. Prospects with one season or less of major league service time were eligible for the list, and Miller was 4th in the rotation which also included Boston's Daisuke Matsuzaka, Philadelphia's Cole Hamels, New York Yankees' Phillip Hughes, and San Francisco's Tim Lincecum. Miller is the only one in that dream rotation who has yet to appear in the majors.

Strengths & Opportunities: Miller is an extremely confident pitcher, and aggressively attacks every hitter. His four-seam plus-plus fastball consistently clocks in at around 96-97 MPH and it has topped out as high as 101 MPH. He also throws a two-seam fastball that bottoms out well and allows him to better change speeds on his fastball. His best pitch is his plus-plus devastating power slider that he throws in the upper 80s that has excellent tilt and shows great late break. He also throws a changeup, which has become a very good weapon for him and shows good depth. When he is on with the pitch, the development of Miller's changeup has made his fastball and slider almost un-hittable.

Miller has been able to harness his emotions and adrenaline on a consistent basis in order to allow better command of his fastball and secondary pitches when behind in the count. He has very good command of his pitches, and has a clean delivery. He displays quick arm action in his windup, which makes it tough to pick up the baseball in his hand. His secondary pitches are

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crisp and he consistently keeps them down in the zone. Since his recent injuries he has learned to be a pitcher rather than just a thrower the past few seasons by learning to be more efficient with his pitches, use all of his pitches effectively, and rely more on location than just sheer velocity. While he still very much projects as a front-of-the-rotation starter if he can stay healthy, a backend bullpen role certainly seems like an option at least for the immediate future. He is often compared to the likes of Rich Harden and Kerry Wood.

The big red flag with Miller is his injury history. He missed the first few months of the 2005 season when he strained an elbow ligament in spring training, but came back and had a healthy 2006 campaign, his best season as a professional. The injuries have really started to pile up since early 2007 as he went on the disabled list in late May of that year with a slight strain on the last digit of the middle finger on his pitching hand and missed a month and a half. After returning to the rotation in late June from the finger injury, Miller was shutdown for a month because of inflammation in his pitching elbow and pitched sparingly the rest of the season. He came to spring training last year healthy, but was sidelined early in camp for a few weeks by a blister on the middle finger of his throwing hand so he had to stay behind in extended spring training to ramp himself up to be ready to pitch and joined Triple-A Buffalo a few weeks into the season. At the end of May his season ended when he had to have season ending surgery to repair a broken callous on the middle finger of his right hand.

The issues with Miller's middle finger on his pitching hand are believed to be the result of all the torque he puts on his middle finger when he pitches. According to Dr. Tom Graham, who is the hand specialist the Indians use to routinely evaluate Miller's hand, he is more susceptible to this type of injury because of his big hands, longer fingers and how hard he throws. When he initially came down with the finger injury in 2007, it was felt with rest the issues he had with his tendon would correct itself on its own. But, when the issue cropped up again in 2008, he had to undergo surgery because he had developed two calluses on it and between the calluses the skin had become soft and developed into a hole in his skin which put his finger at serious risk of infection. Dr. Graham performed surgery in late May to surgically repair the pulley system in Miller's middle finger, but during the surgery he found that Miller's tendons in the finger were starting to fray and that the pulley system in the finger was not working properly. His tendon was off the bone and it had started to rub his skin from underneath and caused a hole from the inside out. So he had reconstructive surgery on it to reattach the flexor tendon to the bone of his finger.

Because Miller has thrown such a small amount of innings over the last two years, this year the Indians will be very mindful of his innings pitched workload. With that in mind, Indians GM Mark Shapiro decided to convert him to a temporary bullpen role for 2009. Such a move may be long overdue given Miller's injury problems, and a move to the bullpen has been favored by many because of his exceptional makeup to go along with his 97-98 MPH fastball and wicked slider combo that he commands well. It is a role that Miller would need to grow into, but one he feels he could handle. After seeing the success that the Cubs had with Kerry Wood in converting the off-injured starter into a closer, the Indians obviously took notice and probably see Miller in much the same vein as Wood from a talent and medical perspective. With Wood now in Cleveland, he could end up serving as a mentor for Miller. He has limited experience pitching in the bullpen, but when he came back from the finger and elbow injuries in 2007 he pitched in eight total games out of the bullpen for Buffalo and he handled it well (1-1, 4.09 ERA, 11 IP, 10 H, 2 BB, 14 K). Down the road Miller could move back to the rotation, but right now he impacts the Cleveland Indians the best in 2009 pitching out of the bullpen.

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While he did not pitch in any regular season games the rest of the season because he was recovering from surgery, Miller got a lot of work in late in the year pitching in sim games at Mahoning Valley and Akron, as well as in Instructional League and in the Dominican Winter League. In the winter leagues, he was up to 97-98 MPH again, using his lower half better, and was getting some punchouts with his slider. Going forward, the big thing is for Miller to prove he can stay healthy. He still needs to continue to develop a feel for pitching to go with his power approach, and his changeup still needs a little more work. He also needs time to get acquainted with the new bullpen role and develop a routine.

The Outlook: Miller is reportedly 100% as his arm feels great and the finger feels good. It has been a frustrating two years for him as the finger injury has delayed his big league debut and the start of a promising baseball career, and if he can remain healthy he should make that big league debut sometime this season. He will be a longshot to win a bullpen job in Cleveland when camp breaks, and should open the 2009 season in the Triple-A Columbus bullpen, but should see time in Cleveland this year.

3. Matt LaPorta - Outfielder/First Baseman

Born: 01/08/1985 - **Height:** 6'2"; - **Weight:** 210 - **Bats:** Right - **Throws:** Right

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	G
2007	22	Helena	R	7
	22	West Virginia	A	23
2008	23	Huntsville	AA	84
	23	Akron	AA	17
		Career		131



History: LaPorta was a 1st round pick in the 2007 Draft by the Milwaukee Brewers out of the University of Florida, and then was traded to the Indians in July 2008 as part of the haul the Indians received in trading C.C. Sabathia to the Brewers. He was actually drafted as a catcher out of high school in the 14th round of the 2003 Draft by the Chicago Cubs, but did not sign. He led the NCAA in home runs as a sophomore at Florida.

2009 Indians Top Prospects: #5-1

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Strengths & Opportunities: In just 477 at bats as a professional, LaPorta has 34 HR and has a .577 slugging percentage. He has impact potential as a middle-of-the-lineup run producer in the big leagues with his plus-plus power to all fields, and he is big and strong with the ability to handle more advanced pitching right now. He was primarily a pull-power hitter in college, but he has no problem driving balls out away from him now. He also has an advanced approach at the plate with good pitch recognition skills and patience to wait for his pitch to hit or take a walk. He has excellent bat speed that helps not only with his power, but also lets him wait longer to swing so he can get a better read on pitches. His good hand-eye coordination should allow him to hit for average or close to it at the major league level.

LaPorta is a feared hitter that pitchers often pitch around, but he has shown an innate ability to get his pitch to hit and drive it out of the park. He has a very good work ethic with a great deal of character, and is great in the clubhouse. He has outstanding makeup and displays maturity both on the field and off it. He is the complete package with the charm, looks, power and ability to be the face of a franchise. There is certainly a ton of talent in his bat, and he is often compared by scouts to a young Pat Burrell.

Upon signing with the Brewers, LaPorta was moved to the outfield for the first time in his baseball career. The Indians will sort through what position is best for him, but his bat is going to find its way into any lineup. While he will primarily play left and right field this year, the Indians will keep first base an option for him in order to allow him more versatility. They were really impressed with his play in left field after they acquired him, and feel he is at worst a serviceable outfielder and could be an average-to-above average defensive first baseman. He is slightly below average with his speed, so his average routes and average jumps combined with his speed gives him a step or too less to cover ground in the outfield. Still, he has shown a great release and gets to a lot of average and routine plays in the outfield. He has shown good instincts and is a gamer. His arm strength is a tick above average, but very accurate.

Last year was a whirlwind for LaPorta with the crazy travel schedule he had after being traded. He was traded to the Indians and sent to Akron in early July, then went to New York to play in the Futures Game a week later, then before returning to Akron after the All-Star break had to return home to Florida for a week to be with his family for the death of his grandfather, then a week and a half after returning to Akron he went to California to meet up with his Team USA teammates, then he went to North Carolina to play an exhibition series against Team Canada, and then he was off to Beijing, China to play in the Olympics before he returned to Akron for the final two weeks of the season in late August. All of that happened over the course of six weeks. He was also involved in a scary incident in the Olympics when he was struck in the head with a pitch in a game against China, but tests were negative and he was diagnosed with a mild concussion.

For now, LaPorta will continue to predominantly get his at bats in left field and take some ground balls from time to time at first base. He needs to continue to get better with his route running and getting better jumps in the outfield. While he does hit a lot of home runs and he does draw walks, he is very much the traditional slugger where he will likely always have over 100 strikeouts in a season. Also, he still has plenty to learn as he is still adapting to the professional game having played in only one and a half seasons as a professional, but what he has done from a performance standpoint already is greatly impressive. He will benefit from a full season in the minor leagues in 2009 to better settle in and work on polishing his near major league ready game.

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Monday, March 23 2009 7:00 PM -

Outlook: It is hard to give an exact timetable on when LaPorta should reach the big leagues as the Indians have adopted the approach to just let his progress dictate where he ends up. They feel he has a chance to be a run producing bat for them in the near future and want to be certain he is ready and finished off before giving him that big league call. The stats late last season did not show it, especially in the Eastern League playoffs, but he had some really great at bats and was close to putting things together. The Indians just want him to get comfortable in the organization and it could mean he spends most if not all of the 2009 season in the minors. He will open the season in Triple-A Columbus.

2. Nick Weglarz - Outfielder

Born: 12/16/1987 - **Height:** 6'3" - **Weight:** 255 - **Bats:** Left - **Throws:** Left

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	G
2005	17	Burlington	R	41
2006	18	GCL Indians	R	1
2007	19	Lake County	A	125
	19	Kinston	A+	2
2008	20	Kinston	A+	106
		Career		275



History: Weglarz was a 3rd round pick by the Indians in the 2005 Draft out of Lakeshore Catholic High School (Ontario, Canada). In 2006, he played only one game for the rookie level Gulf Coast League (GCL) Indians as he was sidelined for the entire season with a broken hand.

Strengths & Opportunities: Weglarz is an impressive physical specimen, and at 250+ pounds and strong as an ox he easily has the best power bat in the Indians' system. He has tremendous power, and often is compared to Jim Thome because of that left-handed power and plate discipline. He has some flaws in his swing that will need to be tinkered along the way, but his long arms and good bat speed generate tremendous power. He is a developed hitter with above-average hand-eye coordination, and he loves low pitches so he can extend through it either away or down and in. He stays within himself and to his plan. As with most big sluggers, he is a below average runner and lacks much athleticism.

2009 Indians Top Prospects: #5-1

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Monday, March 23 2009 7:00 PM -

At a young age Weglarz has shown the past two seasons in Single-A Lake County and advanced Single-A Kinston that he understands the value of on-base percentage and has a good understanding of the strike zone. The plate discipline is off the charts good, and it is not just the walks, it is how smart he is as a hitter where he lays off so many borderline pitches when he is ahead in the count, which shows how mature of a hitter he is and shows he is ready to be a star in the big leagues. He is still a young, unpolished hitter who strikes out a lot, but he also shows excellent patience in waiting for his pitch and rarely swinging at pitches outside of the zone, which is uncommon for a player his age.

Weglarz is a big kid who has continued to bulk up and grow into his body, and the Indians think will still get bigger as he matures. He was drafted as a first baseman; however, since joining the Indians he has not played first base as they decided to move him to the outfield. If he continues to get bigger some think he could end up back at first base. He has made significant progress as an outfielder where the Indians have worked on his footwork, throwing mechanics, and his route-running to the ball. He will never win a Gold Glove out in left field, but he has become at least a tick below average as a fielder and shows an adequate arm.

The high strikeout rate is concerning and he does not hit for a very high average, but he is a slugger and while he may never be a .300 hitter he has enough plate discipline to where he could still get on base at a .360-.380 clip and become a 30-40 home run a year player in the big leagues. Teams typically do not pitch to him, but he continues to stay patient and not leave the zone and just waits for his pitch. Last year the Indians worked on his leg position and made some mechanical adjustments to his swing. He needs to continue working on using the other side of the field and hitting balls the other way by staying on balls and not falling into his tendencies to pull off and roll balls over where he grounds out. He still needs more work in the outfield getting good reads off the bat, and the Indians will also try to work him some into right field this year.

In October/November 2007 Weglarz played for Team Canada and went over to Taiwan and Australia to play in the World Cup and did well in limited playing time. Then, in March 2008, he again suited up for Canada and went to Australia to play in the Olympic qualifiers, this time as a starter hitting in the middle of the lineup where he hit .450 in the seven games played and lead all players in the tournament with three home runs. His performance helped guide the Canadian team to a 6-1 record and they earned a berth in the Olympic Games in Beijing later in the summer. He again joined up with his Canadian teammates for the third time in nine months when he left the Indians for a month in July to play for Canada in the Olympics and again impressed in his time playing against higher level competition and was named team MVP for Canada.

Outlook: Second only to Matt LaPorta, Weglarz had one of the craziest travel schedules in the Indians system last year going to China, Australia, and Taiwan in the span of nine months from October 2007 to July 2008. He handled it well, although could probably use a full season this upcoming year in one place to really hone in on his game. He will leave the Indians in spring training this March to play for Team Canada yet again in the World Baseball Classic, but after that all commitments with Team Canada should be complete for a few years. This upcoming season is a big year for him, a separator in that his performance in Double-A will either solidify what people have been raving about or start to wonder if he is too much projection. Needless to say, he is ready to have a big year, and will open the 2009 season in the Double-A Akron outfield.

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Monday, March 23 2009 7:00 PM -

1. Carlos Santana - Catcher

Born: 04/08/1986 - Height: 5'11" - Weight: 190 - Bats: Switch - Throws: Right

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	G
2005	19	GCL Dodgers	R	32
2006	20	Ogden	R	37
	20	Vero Beach	A+	54
2007	21	Great Lakes	A	86
2008	22	Inland Emp	A+	99
		Kinston	A+	29
		Akron	AA	2
		Career		339



History: Santana was an undrafted free agent signing by the Los Angeles Dodgers out of the Dominican Republic in August 2004. He was traded to the Indians along with John Meloan on July 25th for Casey Blake. He was named the 2008 Carolina League MVP, and his announcement as the league MVP shows just how ridiculous his numbers were there prior to the Indians acquisition of him in the Blake deal. Even though he spent the last six weeks of the season with the Indians at advanced Single-A Kinston in the Carolina League, he still finished 2nd in the California League in hitting (.323), 8th in doubles (34), 3rd in RBI (96), 5th in walks (69), 1st in on-base percentage (.431), 2nd in slugging percentage (.563), and 1st in OPS (.993).

Strengths & Opportunities: Scouts view Santana as an everyday big-league catcher with excellent potential offensively and some upside defensively. That ability to hit for a high average, hit with power, and exhibit outstanding plate discipline is what makes him such a special hitter. Like incumbent Indians starting catcher Victor Martinez, he is a switch-hitter who has 20-25 home run power and is an RBI machine. He has a great feel for the bat and strike zone, is a true hitter, and the ball just explodes off his bat. There are just some guys who find the sweet part of the bat more often and he is one of them. He is a competitor, and a very aggressive attack the ball kind of hitter. He is a switch hitter at a premium position who is very athletic and has a lot of strength. He is lean and not a very big guy as he only stands at 5'11" tall, but he is built like a Greek god and is very strong in his arms and wrists. As he

2009 Indians Top Prospects: #5-1

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Monday, March 23 2009 7:00 PM -

continues to grow into his body, the weight and more power will surely come, and he may even grow a few inches still.

In addition to all of the production, Santana showed a very advanced approach at the plate last year as he drew 89 walks to only 85 strikeouts in 463 at bats. What really shot his prospect stock up was after leaving the bandboxes in the notorious hitter friendly California League, he came to the pitch friendly confines of the Carolina League and was even better and did not skip a beat. Also, unlike most first basemen and catchers, he has a good motor and can steal a base from time to time and is not a liability on the basepaths. He is a smart runner, often getting good jumps going from first to third and second to home, which is how he scores so many runs. His athleticism on the bases and behind the plate combined with his awesome abilities as a hitter and upside defensively makes him one heck of a talent the Indians were able to pry away from the Dodgers.

Santana has been widely mentioned as just an offensive catcher, but he clearly has the work ethic and untapped talent to become a good defensive backstop. He showcases excellent arm strength with a lightning bolt for an arm, which is no surprise as he is a former third baseman. As a converted third baseman and outfielder, last season was only his second year playing the catching position, but he loves playing there and has grown into the position well by becoming more comfortable back there as the season went on. He loves to throw the ball behind the plate, whether it be throwing out potential base-stealers or throwing behind runners on base. He has a great passion for catching and loves to take charge; he is a leader. He has good hands, and is already at least an average receiver with the potential to become an above average receiver.

The Indians love his arm strength behind the plate. His throwing has not been much of a problem for him so far in his transition to catching, but his receiving skills behind the plate are still very much rough around the edges. The Indians will continue to work with him to develop him behind the plate in receiving the ball, calling games, blocking balls, and throwing out runners. If he has trouble adapting to catching in the higher levels, it is always possible the Indians may convert Santana back to third base or even put him in the outfield. Either way, the bat will play somewhere. But, at the moment he is 100% entrenched at the catching position and there are absolutely no plans to move him from out behind there.

Outlook: The Indians feel they got more than they thought they were getting when they acquired Santana, which of course is good for them. He fills two needs in the organization in that he helps add talent to the catching position and also adds a big bat to the system. With the injury to Matt McBride last year along with some inconsistent performances by Wyatt Toregas and Chris Gimenez, the Indians needed more high quality catching solutions. Prior to his arrival, none of the catchers in the Indians system were viewed as impact caliber or everyday catchers except maybe McBride, but Santana could change all that with his bat. Now that he is in the organization, he is already being considered Victor Martinez's eventual replacement at catcher in a year or two. With Martinez struggling to stay healthy the past two seasons and a looming free agent after the 2010 season, a move of Martinez to first base full time down the road or his exit as a free agent after the 2010 season could pave the way for Santana to have the full time catching job in Cleveland at the start of 2011. He will open the 2009 season at Double-A Akron.

Photos of Huff, Miller, and LaPorta courtesy of Ken Carr and photos of Weglarz and Santana

2009 Indians Top Prospects: #5-1

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, March 23 2009 7:00 PM -

courtesy of Carl Kline