

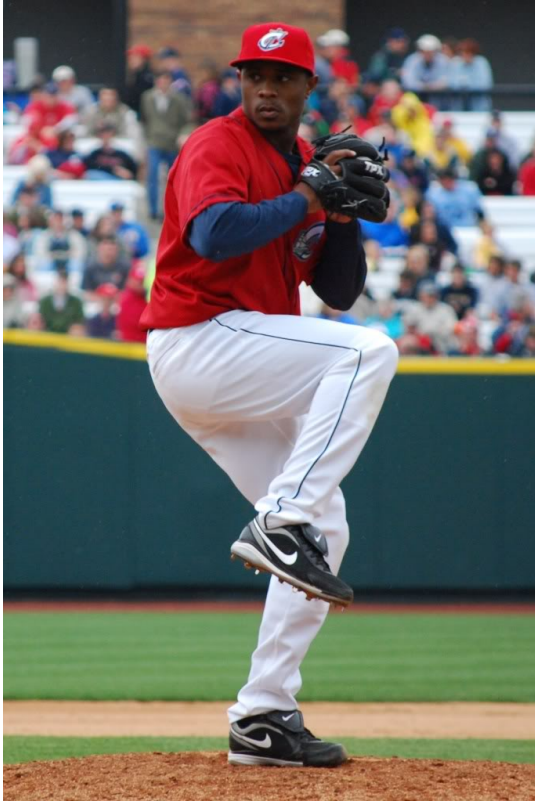
## Finally Healthy, Sipp Is Ready To Contribute

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, April 22 2009 7:00 PM -

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Two years ago at this time left-hander Tony Sipp's career took a major turn for the worse. Near the end of spring training in 2007, Sipp came down with a strain to the ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) in his pitching elbow which resulted in the Indians completely shutting him down for the first half of that season, and later resulted in Sipp having to go under the knife. Fast forward to today, and the two year journey Sipp has been on recovering from Tommy John surgery is complete as he is 100% healthy and ready to go. And, apparently, the Indians feel he is ready to go as they called him up last night to help contribute to a big league bullpen in bad need of a spark.



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Near the end of spring training in 2007, Sipp came down with a strain to the ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) in his pitching elbow which resulted in the Indians completely shutting him down for the first half of that season. After the pain did not subside when he started a rehab throwing program a few months later, the Indians sent him to Dr. James Andrews in July 2007. There it was discovered that 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. The results of the MRI meant he would have to undergo Tommy John surgery.

It was a crushing blow to the Indians and Sipp as he was expected to be a part of the big league bullpen as an impact reliever at some point during that season. He was the Indians 4<sup>th</sup> best prospect in the farm system in 2007 according to *Basebal*

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, and they even rated him as the 2<sup>nd</sup>

best relief prospect in all of baseball. That was all put on hold with the elbow injury.

With the surgery it completely wiped out the rest of his 2007 season and he spent most of the first half of the 2008 season rehabbing to get back to where he could go out on a rehab assignment the second half of the season and pitch in games. Sipp showed a complete recovery with few setbacks, and finished the 2008 season going 0-3 with a 2.67 ERA in 24 combined relief appearances with the rookie level GCL Indians, advanced Single-A Kinston, and Double-A Akron. In 33.2 innings he allowed 23 hits, 11 walks and piled up 46 strikeouts.

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Sipp, 25, is still not all the way back as he is still working to get his legs back under him, but his health, velocity, and stuff have all returned. In four games with Triple-A Columbus he is 0-0 with a 3.86 ERA, and in 7.0 innings has allowed 8 hits, 5 walks and has 10 strikeouts.

"He has been good here," said Triple-A Columbus Pitching Coach Scott Radinsky when asked about Sipp over the weekend. "With the amount of time he has had off the last year and a half I think he is still getting back under his feet, but the ball is coming out of his hand with good life to it."

Sipp is a power-armed lefty with a fastball that 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. His slider is his out pitch and considered a plus-plus pitch with great bite, and he also throws a changeup to help keep hitters honest.

But it is his toughness and aggressive approach on the mound which have caught the attention of many, including Radinsky.

"Even when he is not on, he has this thing inside that finds a way to get outs

and get out of a jam," said Radinsky. "He's got it. He is one of my favorites, more because of his guts inside and stuff-wise. How he gets after it, that's what I like, and I respect it. A lot of guys have good stuff, but they don't know how to use it. He knows how to use it, and he has some balls."

Sipp himself is happy to be all the way back, and at the time I spoke to him on Sunday morning he deemed himself ready for the "call"; whenever he gets it. Little did he know it would come sooner rather than later.

"Everything is back to normal," said Sipp on Sunday. "I still have yet to come in during the middle of an inning, but I think I am there. Obviously the organization is going to take a precautionary course as they still want to wait until it warms up and see what happens then."

The Indians may not have planned to call up Sipp to the big league team until midseason, but things can change pretty quickly especially when you are having problems in the bullpen to close out games and get an effective outing from nearly the entire staff. Even worse, their prized lefty setup man Rafael Perez has been awful the first two weeks of the season, and the Indians are in big need of a left-hander who can come in and get meaningful outs late in games until Perez can get things ironed out.

Sipp can help in this area, but the key with him is his health.

After a successful return last season from Tommy John surgery, the Indians had planned to send him out to the Dominican Republic to get some extra work in, but that trip never happened when he came down with some soreness to his shoulder. As a result, the trip to the Dominican Republic was cancelled and Sipp was shutdown until a few weeks before spring training.

"I had a shoulder issue and spent the offseason knocking that out of the way," said Sipp.

The shoulder issue he came down with in the offseason is one of those untold news stories that went under the radar somewhat. It was reported on [Indians Prospect Insider](#)

back in late December that Sipp was complaining of some shoulder discomfort at the end of the season and in the early part of his

offseason workouts. Nothing came of it and it was sort of swept under the rug until spring training arrived and some reports talked about some of his issues he had in the offseason.

But the severity of the situation was never truly conveyed by the Indians of the media.

"I think it was a bigger issue than it actually got played," said Sipp about the offseason shoulder injury. "I thought it was pretty serious, but it got downplayed because of the free time that I had in the offseason."

Sipp felt the injury after a bullpen session and waking up the next morning.

"I woke up and came to the field and said 'I really don't want to do anything today, I kind of want to take a break'," said Sipp. "It was the offseason and I didn't think it would be a big deal, but they still wanted me to do something, so I went out and was jogging in place and I could feel it doing that. It was right in my back area [of my shoulder], so we did an MRI and sure enough they said the ligament which is supposed to hold it in place just gave out. Whatever was supposed to hold my arm in and out of the slot wasn't there. So I had to build up the muscles around it, and it took care of itself."

Because of the shoulder injury, Sipp came into spring training a little behind the other pitchers. Fortunately for him, spring training was extended by almost two weeks this year because of the World Baseball Classic. This allowed him more time to get back into pitching shape so he could open the season with Triple-A Columbus rather than start it on the disabled list.

"I was scheduled to be about a week behind everybody," said Sipp. "I knew I did not want to go out there until I was well. I

actually got better sooner than what I thought I would. Coming into camp I thought I would have to push myself back more, but it didn't happen as I came back feeling good. I just said let's go with it and stick with the schedule."

His schedule now includes a lot of extra work everyday to help ensure that his arm and shoulder holds up.

"Hopefully that is the last I have to deal with that," said Sipp. "Before games I still do maintenance work to ensure it doesn't come back. It is kind of a process this year to make sure I keep an eye on it and do the preparatory work like warming up and making sure I am over prepared before I go out there so nothing crazy happens."

Given his injury history of late, the extra preparatory work is something Sipp will probably have to do the rest of this season if not for most of his career to help avoid injury setbacks with his prized left arm and shoulder.

"I don't know if I have to do it, but it is definitely something I am going to do for awhile," said Sipp. "It is kind of scary because you don't want to be out of the game and look back and be like 'I wonder if I could have stayed if I just would have done the work'." I want to go through the whole season healthy and get these restrictions off me and get this injury prone title off me. I know how that can hurt a lot of guys when they get that title, so that is all I want to do this year is just be healthy and whatever results I have is a plus. It can't be a minus for me if I am still healthy."

With the injuries behind him, and his major league career in front of him now, Sipp has one main goal the rest of this season.

"The ultimate goal has always been to get better wherever I am," said Sipp. "But my whole goal this year is to remain

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healthy. I did not set a results goal, I mean, it would be nice to do good, but right now I just want to maintain my body. I want to be able to come out and do it again next year.&quot;

If he can impress in his first call up to the big leagues, Sipp will get many opportunities to do just that.

*Photo courtesy of Tony Lastoria*