

Gimenez Trying To Recover From Slow Start

Written by {ga=consigliere}

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Many people remember the name Chris Gimenez from spring training out in Goodyear, AZ. Gimenez had a great spring, and showed excellent versatility by playing catcher, first base, third base, and left field. He damn near made the big league team. Sent down to AAA Columbus, Jimenez started the minor league season off by going 0-22, and since then he has been battling to get his numbers back to respectability and where he feels they should be. Tony had a chance to talk to the Indians prospect this past weekend.



This was not the kind of start that Triple-A Columbus catcher Chris Gimenez envisioned back when he packed his bags at the end of a successful showing in spring training out in Goodyear, AZ and boarded a plane for Columbus, OH a month ago.

Gimenez, 26, got off to an 0-for-22 start the first week and a half of the season, and since then he has been battling to get his numbers back to respectability and where he feels they should be. So far it has been a struggle as in 28 games he is only hitting .216 with 4 HR, 11 RBI and a .671 OPS. In particular the strikeouts have been alarming, as he has 29 strikeouts in just 97 at bats, good for almost a 3:1 at bat to strikeout ratio which is not very good.

Still, Gimenez recognizes that his early season struggles are a result from getting out of his plan, and he is working to get back to getting back to his more patient approach.

"I'll tell you what, I definitely got out of my approach for awhile," said Gimenez in a recent interview at Huntington Park in Columbus. "I'm usually a guy who no matter what I

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am usually going to take the first pitch.
rds the end of spring training I could feel myself getting out of it.

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It was the end of spring training, and it is not like I didn't care, but you are just trying to push through it and stay healthy so you can get the heck out of there.

I had been there for two months, so it was a long time to be there.

You kind of just feel yourself getting into bad habits."

When the Columbus players and staff arrived in Columbus from spring training, the Huntington Park facility was still not fully operational so they were unable to use the cages or field to take batting practice or infield. Not being able to work through the issues he was starting to experience the last three or four days of spring training and into the start of the season sort of compounded the issue.

"We flew here, and this place was still getting ready on the first day we got here so we couldn't really do anything until like a day or two before we left to go on our road trip to start the season," said Gimenez. "So I took like three days off from swinging, and I think all of that combined just really started to play with me. I am not really worried about the batting average.

It is a lot about [on-base percentage] and just having a quality at bat and having a good approach at the plate."

Gimenez appears to be slowly turning it around. With the help of Columbus Hitting Coach Jon Nunnally, they have gotten him to go back to using his hands more at the plate.

"I have [made some adjustments] actually," said Gimenez. "I kind of just stopped using my hands and started using my entire body to swing.

You see those 0-for-10s and 0-for-14s, so I was just trying to make things happen and I went into pull mode because I think that is my strength which it is not.

My strength is going the other way and staying up the middle.

I just started really getting my hands going again, and that really helps me see the ball better.

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When I am using my body I am lunging out front, but when I use my hands I am staying back and see the ball really good.

Nunnally is like my second father, and we talk about stuff mentally with my approach and just trying to get things going.

I am probably the most positive [.216 hitter] you could imagine (laughs)."

When it rains it usually pours, which was the case with Gimenez the second week of the season when he was smashed in the head with a baseball bat that required five stitches to the top of his head. The follow through of a hitter had caught him on the top of his catcher's mask, and the force of the bat hitting the helmet caused it to pinch and give him a big gash on the top of his head.



Being off to the start he is offensively, the knock to the head with the bat was sort of the last straw for him and he was uncharacteristically irate and showed his displeasure after the play with a few choice words.

"A lot of it was frustration because I was leading off the next inning where in my last at bat I had put a good swing on the ball and had a sac fly," said Gimenez. "I was positive and excited.

We had a double play situation with a long swing guy at the plate, so we throw him a changeup and the batter swings through it.

I can't imagine how bad he did it, but he clobbered me dead square in the back of the head.

I went straight to the ground and I was pissed that he did it.

The day before he took a swing on a fastball away and squared me up on the arm for catcher's interference.

I was not close to him, as I was the same distance away as I am for everybody else.

It did not crack my mask, it bent it in and pinched my head.

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So I get up and go to straighten my mask up, and I feel a bunch of stuff going down my neck and I thought it was dirt.

I had no idea.

So I took my mask off and see a pool of blood and I was so mad because I knew I was going to have to come out of the game.

I dropped a few f-bombs, left to get five stitches, and missed three days."

Gimenez was rostered this past offseason by the Indians, which shows their confidence in him as a player to be a major league depth option this year and also how much they value his versatility. While he can play left field, third base and first base, the focus right now will be to primarily play him at catcher. He is splitting catching duties with fellow catcher Columbus teammate Wyatt Toregas, though Gimenez gets the lion's share of starts behind the plate.

He also opened some eyes in with his performance in spring training, and did a great job of making a first impression with Indians Manager Eric Wedge and the big league staff. Since they do not typically see many - if any at all - of the minor league players during the season, it is always important to show what you can do when given a chance in spring training to participate in big league camp.

"That was my whole goal going into spring training, which was to make an impression," said Gimenez. "I think I had an outside chance if something happened that I could make the team. They told me that going into spring training that it was between me, [Josh] Barfield and [Tony] Graffanino [to get that last roster spot]. They told me that, and I said realistically 'do I have a chance?'

I could come out of nowhere with it, so I just went out there every day to kind of prove to them that they did the right thing in putting me on the roster and that I can do it at that level and be successful.

It kind of was like a personal vendetta where I just wanted to prove to somebody that I am here, don't forget about me, and I can play wherever you want me to and hit too."

At this point, Gimenez's goal is to pull himself out of the early season offensive funk he is in,

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and maybe by the end of the year get a call to Cleveland for a cup of coffee.

"Absolutely," said Gimenez in response to a potential call up to Cleveland. "That would be the ultimate goal.

It is just tough because I am super competitive and I want to be a leader of this team and want to start helping these guys.

To be a leader you need to lead by example and I have not been doing that a lot lately."