

Tomlin, Perez & House Next Indians Pitching Hopefuls

Written by {ga=consigliere}

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Josh Tomlin, Alexander Perez, and T.J. House. Three names that are not likely to be familiar ones with most Indians fans. But they are three of the fastest emerging pitching prospects in the Indians farm system. Tomlin is at AA Akron. Perez and House both pitch currently for the A ball Lake County Captains. Tony had a chance to talk with all three pitchers in recent trips to Akron and Eastlake.



Tomlin Enjoying Move To Rotation

When it comes to versatility as a pitcher, Double-A Akron right-hander Josh Tomlin is the epitome of versatility.

Tomlin, 24, is one of the Indians better pitching prospects often overlooked by fans mostly because he doesn't have dominating stuff and that he has gone back forth between the bullpen and starting rotation during his four year Indians career. This season, he is in the Akron rotation and has performed quite well to date going 5-2 with a 3.98 ERA in eight starts and in 43.0 innings has allowed 50 hits, 7 walks, and has 40 strikeouts.

"It is going good," said Tomlin in a recent interview at Canal Park when asked about how things are going for him in the starting rotation. "I am just taking it day by day because we are having rainouts and some guys are getting bumped early.

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Some guys are going on six days rest while others on four days.

I just kind of wait to see when I will pitch.

But everything else is going good."

Tomlin throws his fastball in the low 90s and has developed a pretty good slider in the past year. But his ability to command the baseball and pound the zone with strikes makes his stuff play up and more effective. In addition to his command and control, though, his best quality as a pitcher is that versatility he possesses where he can really pitch in any role on a pitching staff. Whether he is a starter, long man, middle reliever, setup man or closer, he performs in any role.

Tomlin was awesome last year at High-A Kinston where he really jumped onto the prospect map after he went 9-5 with a 2.98 ERA and in 102.2 innings allowed 82 hits, 16 walks, and had 109 strikeouts. His work largely came out of the bullpen as 31 of his 40 appearances in Kinston where in relief. What scouts and the Indians were mostly impressed with was how his fastball velocity ticked up and his slider improved by leaps and bounds to become an above average offering and potential big league out pitch.

This past offseason, the Indians decided to move Tomlin back into the rotation. He went out to the Arizona Fall League and had mixed results going 2-3 with a 6.43 ERA in eight starts, and came into spring training and this season continuing to adjust to the new full time starter's gig.

"I think it is going well," said Tomlin. "I went to the Arizona Fall League as a starter, so I kind of got into that routine again.

But even in the fall league you get Sunday's off, so it is a six day routine instead of a five day one.

But transitioning from the fall league to here hasn't been much of a difference because they started me off in spring training as a starter.

So I kind of had that mentality going into the season."

In addition to adjusting to the routine of starting again, Tomlin is also continuing to work on his

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command and location. He knows that with the lack of a true out pitch and dominating stuff, his success will largely be determined on how well he can paint the corners and throw consistent, quality strikes.

"I am just trying to focus on throwing all of my pitches for a strike in the bottom half of the zone," said Tomlin. "I am working on throwing changeups more to right-handers every now and then to just show them that pitch so it can open up my cutter away.

I'm just trying to work both sides of the plate with every pitch."

Now that he is starting again, his velocity has bumped back to his normal 88-91 MPH range. Last year he was throwing harder in the bullpen, sitting at 90-92 MPH and touching 93 MPH at times, but in the rotation he has to hold it back a little and not air it out as much as he was in the bullpen last season.

"Yeah, [the velocity] has ticked back a little bit," said Tomlin. "I usually sit around 88-90 MPH and hit 91 MPH every now and then again.

In the bullpen I was usually at 92 MPH and would hit 93 MPH every now and again.

As a starter I feel like I'm not only trying to pace myself, but you also throw more pitches since you throw a bullpen every third day.

You may not feel as strong, but you are still trying to go out there to be efficient and give as many innings as you can to save the bullpen."

His secondary offerings continue to improve. The Indians really like his slider, but his other pitches like his curveball and changeup continue to show improvement and now are quality

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pitches in his arsenal.

"Actually my curveball is kind of my third or fourth best pitch this year," said Tomlin. "I have kind of worked on making that a littler bit tighter in the offseason and I feel it is getting better.

I am still throwing it hard and it has been effective as a groundball and contact pitch when needed and also to put guys away with."

So far, Tomlin is enjoying his first experience playing in Akron. It is widely considered that the jump from High-A to Double-A is a big separator, and Tomlin agrees with that.

"I like it here," said Tomlin. "The experience is good as there are a lot of good players. You are not just facing 2-3-4 hitters that are good, you are facing [a lineup of] 1 through 9 that are going to be good hitters.

I think it is a good stepping stone for my career.

It is different from Kinston where you can't just get a guy out with a curveball in the dirt.

Alexander The Great

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Perez, 19, is off to a great start with the Captains where in eight starts he is 2-2 with a 3.67 ERA, and in 41.2 innings he has allowed 39 hits, 13 walks and has 39 strikeouts. His success to start the season is from the springboard he received from a very good campaign last year with the rookie level Gulf Coast League Indians where as an 18-year old he went 2-4 with a 4.26 ERA in ten starts.

Perez is making his full season debut in the Indians organization this year with the Captains, and is excited about the opportunity the Indians have given him.

"I am very happy with the organization because being here at this level with only three years as a professional I am very pleased with the opportunities the Indians are giving me," said Perez through interpreter and teammate Paolo Espino. "Starting here in Lake County is nice to be on a full season team at 19-years old. I am very happy, and I know a lot of players would like this opportunity, so I am very thankful."

Starting Perez off in Lake County also shows how much the organization values him, which is a big boost to his confidence as a player.

“It is a great experience here in Lake County because last year when I used to pitch in the Gulf Coast League I used to just pitch for the manager and club because there were no fans,” said Perez. “I feel good because this is a higher level and I am progressing. Now I don't pitch for only the manager and club, I also pitch for the fans.”

Performing in front of fans is something that Perez and a lot of young Latin players are not used to at first when they come stateside to the United States and play with a full season team for the first time. After an early bout of jitters, Perez has started to settle in.

“Because I came from the Gulf Coast League, at the beginning of the season I used to get nervous with the fans,” said Perez. “Down in the Gulf Coast League if you made a mistake with a pitch no one screams or does anything, where up here if you miss and they hit a home run off you they scream and let you know (laughs). Now I feel better and I am more confident. I have had a good start, but I was struggling a little bit early in the season. I think I am improving and have better command and feel good.”

The Indians signed Perez as an undrafted free agent out of the Dominican Republic in May of 2007. The Indians had him go to their baseball academy located in Boca Chica, Dominican Republic, and with several of their top scouting staff present they observed him for five days before deciding to sign him. At the time, the Philadelphia Phillies were also interested in him too, but he decided to sign with the Indians because of how strong they felt about him as a player.

“When the Phillies were watching me, I felt there was really no big interest,” said Perez. “But then the Indians saw me and

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As the 2009 season plays out, Perez just wants to continue to grow as a pitcher and put up numbers to further enhance his value to the organization.

"I want to [keep the walks down] and show good command," said Perez about his goals this year. "And I want to have really good stats."

House Happy To Get First Season Going



Low-A Lake County 19-year lefty T.J. House had a lot of hype coming into this season. Having yet to throw a pitch as an Indian before the start of the season, he was ranked almost unanimously as one of the Indians top 20-25 prospects coming into the season.

House has the maturity well beyond his years to handle such expectations, but in the early going he has been more focused on getting his career started on the right note by getting his first professional start and win out of the way.

"It was a weight off my shoulders," said House last week at Classic Park in Lake County. "Of course you look forward to getting that first win out of the way and getting things rolling. It feels like things are running smooth now and I am getting into a routine and don't need to worry about it. It is wonderful to get it as the first one is always the hardest and best one, but now it is time to go out and get a bunch more."

The 6'2" 215-pounder recorded his first win about four weeks ago on April 27th at Hagerstown going six innings and allowing just one run on four hits, no walks and had four strikeouts. To date in six starts he is 1-5 with a 3.33 ERA, and in 46.0 innings has allowed 38 hits, 17 walks and has 37 strikeouts.

To some, it was sort of surprise that the Indians had House open the season with a full season team considering he was just 19-years old and fresh out of high school. The Indians typically keep their recently signed draft picks out of high school in camp for extended spring training to better adapt them to the game, learn to develop a routine, and receive more instruction.

But the Indians did not do that with House, which shows the level of confidence they have in his advanced pitching abilities and maturity. Being sent to Lake County to start the season was a shot in the arm for his confidence, and now he is just trying to prove every time out he belongs there.

"I just want to go out and do well and show them I deserve to be here," said House. "Just get a win for my team and give them the best chance to get some runs on the board and get a 'W'. I have tried to treat it like I am still in Goodyear with no stands and I am on the same baseball field as I was when I was there. I am just going to throw. That is the philosophy I have taken into it and I think it [has gone] pretty well."

House is a physically advanced 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. Even with all his natural abilities, there is still much to learn.

"We have been working on a lot of things in the bullpen," said House. "They obviously see what your weaknesses are so they pinpoint them and tell me what I need to work on and I am fine with that. I am ready to go out there and work, I need improvement. I know I have a lot to learn and a lot to do."

Right now House is continuing to work on developing his secondary pitches as well as the command and location of all of his pitches.



"The thing I am really working on now is throwing a first pitch slider for a strike, usually on the second go around with the batters to just try and help me get deeper into a game," said House. "I now have three pitches since I have instituted my changeup into the mix. I have been having problems throwing my slider for a strike. So what we do in the bullpen is work on throwing my slider for a strike every time, that's my main goal. I still work on everything else, but the main focus is throwing a breaking pitch for a strike."

As the 2009 season moves on, House has many goals for himself that he plans to achieve by the time the season ends. Most of his goals are non-performance based and more about his growth as a person and pitcher.

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"The only goal I have is to just become a more physical, mentally prepared pitcher," said House. "Come out here every day, learn, and improve. Stats will take care of themselves if you go out there and do what you are supposed to do. The same goes with moving [up in the system]. I am not worried about that, you can't control it. Just play, have fun and enjoy it because even though this is a job it is still a game and you are supposed to have fun."

"I just want to be able to look back and say 'wow, look how much I didn't know before I got here and look how much I know now'."