

Espino Shows His Versatility On The Mound

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, June 15 2009 7:00 PM -

When it comes to versatility in the pitching department, High-A Kinston right-hander Paolo Espino has it covered. Espino, 22, has had a nice season to date pitching not only at three different levels, but in a starting and relief role as well. Whether it be as a spot starter, long reliever, middle reliever, or a regular in the rotation, he has done it all and performed well this year going a 3-5 with a 4.13 ERA in 14 combined appearances at Low-A Lake County, Kinston, and Double-A Akron (56.2 IP, 49 H, 15 BB, 50 K). Tony had a chance to sit down with him this week.



When it comes to versatility in the pitching department, High-A Kinston right-hander Paolo Espino has it covered.

Espino, 22, has had a nice season to date pitching not only at three different levels, but in a starting and relief role as well. Whether it be as a spot starter, long reliever, middle reliever, or a regular in the rotation, he has done it all and performed well this year going a 3-5 with a 4.13 ERA in 14 combined appearances at Low-A Lake County, Kinston, and Double-A Akron (56.2 IP, 49 H, 15 BB, 50 K).

"I have been pitching okay," said Espino in a recent interview. "I feel fine, and I am pitching well."

Espino opened the season in the Lake County bullpen, but found himself moving around to Akron, Kinston and Lake County to fill in as a spot starter because of injuries and rainouts. He went up to Kinston in early May to make a spot start and did very well, and when lefty Ryan Miller got hurt the next night and went on the

Espino Shows His Versatility On The Mound

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, June 15 2009 7:00 PM -

disabled list, Espino found himself as a permanent resident in the Kinston rotation. Given the chance to start again, he has settled into the rotation nicely.

All this back and forth from level to level and from rotation to bullpen and so on can make it very tough for a pitcher to get into a routine and effectively prepare for an outing. However, Espino handles it better than most pitchers and knows it comes with the territory as a depth guy in the organization.

"It is really not hard for me as I have done both roles," said Espino. "In my mind I have a routine. When they tell me I am going to start, I start following my routine like I used to do. I have been a starter all my life, but in the bullpen I think I have a better shot to make it to the bigs. Going from starter to bullpen I have done it already a couple times. Last season and in my first season I was a bullpen guy at first and then they made me a starter in the second half [of the 2007 season]. I am used to it, so it doesn't take me too long to get ready."

Since joining Kinston on May 8th, Espino has made eight starts and is 1-3 with a 3.35 ERA (40.1 IP, 28 H, 13 BB, 34 K). He was awesome in his first five starts allowing just three runs in 24 innings (1.13 ERA), but in his last three starts he has run into some trouble allowing 12 runs in 16.1 innings (6.61 ERA).

Nonetheless, his performance to date has been solid and it is a far cry from the disappointing season he had last year where he battled injury and ineffectiveness to go 2-2 with a 5.54 ERA in 26 combined appearances at Lake County and Kinston (66.1 IP, 74 H, 23 BB, 68 K). He started the season in the Kinston rotation and went 0-2 with an 8.49 ERA in seven starts before going on the disabled list with a shoulder injury.

"At the beginning of last season I had some sort of soreness or tendonitis," recalled Espino. "The Indians have this scap (scapular) program that they told me that the back of my shoulder and lat were weak so that is why I got hurt. So I did and continue to do this rehab every day where I come in early and do the scap program as well as some bends and the body blade. I was out for about a month last year and got better, then I came back and they sent me down to Lake County and made me a reliever again."

Espino is 100% healthy this year, so the focus is back on his development. When he was in Lake County, he and Pitching Coach Tony Arnold worked on ironing out

Espino Shows His Versatility On The Mound

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, June 15 2009 7:00 PM -

some inconsistencies with his delivery.

"Yeah we worked on my delivery in our bullpen sessions," said Espino. "Mainly my motion and windup as I used to rotate my hips instead of getting the ball on a downhill plane. I used to be real flat."

Espino showcases a fastball that usually sits at 90 MPH and tops out at 92 MPH, and he complements it with a good curveball and changeup. His best pitch is his plus curveball and is a pitch he has the most confidence in. While he lacks size at 5'10" 190-pounds, there is absolutely no lack of heart as he goes right after hitters and works hard.

"I think I have pretty good command, but I think what makes me better is my offspeed pitches," said Espino when asked what his best attribute is as a pitcher. "My changeup is working really well and my breaking ball is my strikeout pitch. So I try to combine my fastball with my changeup and breaking ball to try to mess the hitters up. Change the eye level and stuff."

Espino is from Pamana, but he moved to the United States in 2004 and enrolled in and attended high school in Bradenton, FL. His move stateside was mostly because of some help from his older cousin Damaso Espino who is now a catcher in the upper levels of the Indians farm system.



"I did a tryout in 2003 at a high school in Bradenton and they liked me, so we did the papers to come to the US," recalled Espino. "But it was all because of my cousin Damaso Espino, who is playing right now in Columbus with the Indians. He signed with the Reds when he was 16 and he came to the states first. When he signed at 16 he was not done with high school so he came to the states and finished his last year of high school here. He told the coach at the high school I [eventually] went to about me. So that is when I came here for all the tryouts and did the papers and stuff to come to the US."

Espino Shows His Versatility On The Mound

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, June 15 2009 7:00 PM -

Both Paolo and Damaso got a treat this past spring when they had a chance to play on the same team for Team Panama in the World Baseball Classic (WBC). The WBC has often been panned by many fans and baseball people because of the timing of it and how it can have such a big affect on the players as they get ready for their upcoming season. On the contrary, according to Espino playing in the WBC was the most incredible baseball experience he has ever been a part of in his life.

"It was awesome," said Espino. "I think that it is the highest level that exists on the planet to play in that tournament. It was a totally different experience, and it was great as I spent a lot of time with a lot of big league guys. Our group was in Puerto Rico with the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Netherlands. We all stayed in the same hotel and it was nice to be in the same hotel as all the Dominican players like Big Papi, Pedro Martinez, and all those big guys. Wow. I spent a lot of time with them and talked to some of them and took pictures. It was a great experience."

Having spent the better part of a week with all those big league players and talking with them, Espino soaked in all the knowledge and tips they shared.

"I talked a lot with the shortstop from Kansas City Mike Aviles because my cousin knew him," said Espino. "We spent a lot of time together and had lunch and stuff. I also talked to Edison Volquez and Hanley Ramirez. I also spent a lot of time with Panamanian Carlos Lee. He is a really good guy and he would talk to me a lot and give some good advice."

Espino's Panama team did not last long in the tournament going 0-2 in the opening round which lead to a quick exit. They were overmatched as they played two teams in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic who were loaded with major league All Stars. Even though they did not last long, he was happy to get a chance to play against talent of such high caliber.

"We played Puerto Rico the first game and then the Dominican Republic in the second game, so we had no chance," laughed Espino. "I pitched against Puerto Rico, and did not have a really great experience for me because Pudge Rodriguez hit a home run off me. But it was nice. I don't regret anything. A home run from a big leaguer, oh well, it was a learning experience."

A learning experience that Espino hopes will help pave the way to bigger success

Espino Shows His Versatility On The Mound

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, June 15 2009 7:00 PM -

down the road.