

## Meloan Awaits Call To Cleveland

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Tuesday, June 30 2009 7:00 PM -

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It has been a difficult and frustrating season for the Tribe. The team has used up just about every bullpen option they have available to them in the system, and have looked under every rock and in every dark corner outside the organization for a solution to the bullpen mess. While all this has been going on, it has been puzzling why Triple-A Columbus right-handed reliever John Meloan has yet to get a call to Cleveland. Tony had a chance to talk to Meloan in a recent trip to Columbus, and gets to the bottom of it for our readers.



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It has been a difficult and frustrating season for the Cleveland Indians.

While the lineup has produced as expected, the pitching as a whole has been very inconsistent as well as snake-bitten with injuries and poor performance up and down the staff. There are many areas of the team that have struggled, but the main area of frustration has been the bullpen.

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Meloan, 24, came to the Indians at the end of July last year in the Casey Blake deal that also brought catcher Carlos Santana to the organization. While Santana gets all the hype and pub as an impact prospect, Meloan himself was a crucial pickup in the deal because the Indians felt they were getting a legit arm that could be a part of the major league bullpen for many years.

Meloan throws a fastball that typically sits at 91-93 MPH and tops out around 94-95 MPH, and he complements it with a nasty slider that is his out pitch. In addition to his talent, one of the big selling points for Meloan when he was acquired was how much of a competitor he is on the mound as well as his off the charts makeup.

With his pitching repertoire to go along with his makeup, in the offseason he was viewed as having the makings of a dominant backend reliever down the road, perhaps even a closer. The Indians liked what they had in him and fellow power-armed right-hander Adam Miller so much that they traded another power-armed right-hander Jeff Stevens along with two other high upside arms lower in the system in the deal on New Year's Eve for the versatile Mark DeRosa.

When Stevens was traded and then later on in spring training Miller went on the shelf with a recurrence of his finger injury, while Meloan did not make the major league bullpen out of spring training it was pretty much considered a given that he would be the first option called upon once a need in the bullpen arose.

Yet, here we are almost three full months into the season, and after a plethora of moves with the bullpen Meloan has still not been seen. To date, in 24 appearances with Triple-A Columbus this season Meloan is 0-0 with a 5.65 ERA. In 43.0 innings he has allowed 52 hits, 17 walks, and has 35 strikeouts.

So far, the season has not gone as Meloan thought it would back when he first reported to spring training in mid-February. With his standing in the organization appearing to be solid, and his stock as an up-and-coming bullpen arm as high as it really ever has been, he thought this

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season would show more promise than it has to date.

"No, this is definitely not what I wanted so far," said Meloan in an interview over the weekend in the confines of Huntington Park. "I have had some good outings and lot of bad ones this year. Just as a matter of consistency and trying to find something you can feel comfortable with and take into the gameplan, and not focusing on what is wrong and what you have to do to get hitters out on a regular basis. It has been a roller coaster ride so far, and I think it is starting to level out.

Things are looking better and hopefully I will finish strong the second half of the season."

Yes, things of late have looked better. So far in seven June appearances he has a 2.92 ERA, having allowed 12 hits, three walks, and punched out eight batters in 12.1 innings of work.

Through all the struggles he has had the first few months of the season it hasn't had anything to do with him not being healthy. While there have been some reports from other places that his velocity has been very inconsistent and has dropped, Meloan insists he feels fine physically and is as healthy and strong as he has ever been.

His biggest supporter, Columbus Manager Torey Lovullo, agrees.

"We have seen his velocity as high as 93-94 MPH this year and we have seen it as low as 88 MPH," said Lovullo. "It is not consistent, but it is fine as long as he is throwing strikes. I think earlier in the year he was fresh, ready for the season and excited for it, so was throwing the ball very well in terms of velocity.

But now he is throwing 89-91, which is fine as that is average major league stuff when talking about a fastball.

He just needs to continue to work on solidifying his delivery and he will get his opportunity."

Yes, an opportunity that seems to escape him every time.

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As players are shuffling in and out of the roster and going up and down I-71 between Cleveland and Columbus, Meloan has had to sit back and watch player after player get called into Lovullo's office with the good news that they have been called up to Cleveland.

"It's a good feeling to know that you have an opportunity, but it does add a little extra pressure knowing that at anytime you can go up," said Meloan. "That has kind of played into the up and down of this season thinking that I shouldn't be here or I wish I wasn't here and if I just had two good outings I'd be out of here.

I finally got to the point where you just can't worry about that.

Those decisions are out of your hands.

Just focus on what you can focus on and what you can control and after that it is up to [GM Mark] Shapiro, [manager Eric] Wedge, [Assistant GM Chris] Antonetti and all those guys."

Lovullo says that Meloan has been in the mix for a callup several times this season.

"He has had some good moments, but he has had some moments where he is learning," said Lovullo. "He certainly has had some consideration as one of the names we have thrown around to go to Cleveland and help them out.

Right now he is working on some things with solidifying his delivery and repeating his delivery, and it is coming along.

We feel like in time he is going to be able to go up there and help that club out."

Consider for a moment the opening day bullpen at Triple-A Columbus this year: Greg Aquino, Vinnie Chulk, Matt Herges, Meloan, Tomo Ohka, Rich Rundles, and Tony Sipp.

Of those seven pitchers, three of them - Meloan, Rundles and Sipp - were on the 40-man roster.

To date, however, only one of those pitchers has yet to spend a day in the big leagues this year:

John Meloan.

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