

## Hagadone Is Armed And Dangerous

Written by {ga=consigliere}

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The Indians season mercifully came to an end yesterday. With that, they can finally close the book on what was a very tough 2009 not only at the ticket office and in the standings, but also from a roster standpoint where they had to make several unpopular player personnel decisions. One of those unpopular moves was the trade of All Star catcher Victor Martinez to the Red Sox for three prospects, one of them being Nick Hagadone. Tony had a chance to sit down recently and talk to flamethrowing left-hander to get his take on the trade two months later as well as many other things.



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One of those decisions was to trade the organization's heart and soul, and really the icon and leader of the most recent rebuild in catcher Victor Martinez. The Indians traded Martinez to the Boston Red Sox and in exchange for his services the Indians received right-hander Justin Masterson, right-hander Bryan Price, and left-hander Nick Hagadone. It is the Indians hopes that the players they received in return from the Red Sox blossom into very good major leaguers, and maybe even one of them ends up a leader or one of the team's stars in the near future.

One of those players received in the trade who has star potential written all over him is left-hander Nick Hagadone. And the Indians know it, which helps cure some of the sickness in their stomach after dealing the popular Martinez. Hagadone features an incredible fastball which sits at 95-97 MPH and tops out at 99 MPH.

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His slider and changeup are good secondary offerings, and his stuff along with his tenacity on the mound project him as a potential dominant late inning reliever or even a top shelf closer.

“He has a really impressive arm,” said Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins in a recent interview. “Every person you talk to be it a Red Sox official or a scout for a different organization the first thing that jumps out is he is left-handed and throws 99 MPH. His intangibles are off the charts. From the Boston Red Sox to our scouts to our own assessment, everyone talks about him as being someone who sets the standard and sets the benchmark very high for work ethic, discipline, and passion for baseball. Those are things that are always a nice bonus to a guy who throws 99 MPH, is left-handed, and strikes guys out regularly.”

Since joining the Indians on August 1st, Hagadone has settled in nicely with the organization. Some of that may have had to do with how the Indians and Red Sox operations in the minor leagues are similar. Boston's Farm Director Mike Hazen has been at the helm since 2006, but prior to that he got on the job training as an assistant to former Indians Farm Director John Farrell from 2003-2006 in Cleveland. Hazen has often drawn a lot from his experience as an assistant while with the Indians, which is why the two organizations are similar on a lot of fronts in the player development area.

“It has really gone well, and I have enjoyed my time with the Indians so far,” said Hagadone in a recent interview. “Things here are actually run pretty similar to the Red Sox, so the transition was pretty smooth.”

When the Indians acquired Hagadone he was still in the middle of his rehab coming off of Tommy John surgery in June 2008. As a result, even after the Indians acquired him he was kept on the strict 50 pitch or three inning pitch count the Red Sox had him on. The restrictions limited him from showcasing his outstanding stuff over a five to six inning outing, but in seven combined starts for Low-A Lake County and High-A Kinston he still finished the season going 0-1 with a 3.15 ERA and in 20.0 innings allowed 13 hits, 10 walks and had 27 strikeouts. Overall, in 17 combined appearances between the Indians and Red Sox this year he was 0-3 with a 2.80 ERA (45.0 IP, 26 H, 24 BB, 59 K).

Hagadone had just started throwing in games for the Red Sox Low-A affiliate in Greenville in June, so he only had a handful of outings under his belt upon his

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arrival in Cleveland.

"My arm felt really good, especially since I have been here," said Hagadone. "It recovered a lot better, and in the games my arm [felt] stronger. I [felt] like I could go more, but at the same time I realize why they stopped me because it is not worth it to get hurt again. Just making it through the season healthy and continuing to get better throughout the whole season [was] a success."

Hagadone is participating in the Indians strength and conditioning camp in the Instructional League program out in Good year, AZ this offseason. He has been shut down from doing any throwing this offseason until spring training gets closer, but he is continuing to strengthen his arm and complete his rehab. The Indians want him at or as close to 100% to start next year so his arm is strong enough to handle the rigors of a full season without any (or very limited) restrictions.

Hagadone had the Tommy John surgery on June 10, 2008, and he vividly remembers how the arm injury originally happened back on April 16, 2008.

"It was during a game and in my second or third inning of my third start [in 2008]," said Hagadone. "I threw a changeup and it was probably the best changeup I have ever thrown, and the next pitch I tried to throw one and make it even better and it felt like my arm exploded when I threw it. That's never happened, as I had never been hurt before. I kind of just kept throwing to see if it would go away. It would stop hurting and then as soon as I would throw it would do it all over again. I took myself out the next inning and told them I couldn't go anymore as my forearm felt really tight. The next day they did all the tests for Tommy John. I was supposed to get the surgery a week later, but I actually got an infection in my foot out of nowhere. So it took a month and a half before I had the surgery."

A pitcher's livelihood is his throwing arm, so any serious injury to their arm can create panic for them where they may feel that they may never be able to pitch again or throw the ball like they once used to. In the case of Hagadone, he remained calm and confident he would return because of the confidence he has in himself to come back from adversity and also with the medical team formed to get his arm back to 100%. Also it doesn't hurt to know that these days a high percentage of pitchers successfully return from Tommy John surgery.



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"I was never concerned I was not going to get back to pitching," said Hagadone. "I knew that I was getting surgery from Dr. Andrews and the Red Sox have a very good rehab program and all that. I knew I was going to be fine there. If anything, I was just worrying about falling behind everyone because I was 22 when it happened and I am 24 now. So I feel I got a little behind."

Because he is now 24 years old and should pitch with little restrictions next year, Hagadone could move extremely fast in the system in 2010. It appears that he will likely open the season in the High-A Kinston starting rotation, but he could move out of there quickly if he performs well. It is not out of the realm of possibility that he could shoot all the way up to Triple-A Columbus by the end of the season provided he is healthy and performing at a high level. He may also convert to the backend of the bullpen at some point this offseason or next season to help expedite his movement.

Before Hagadone has any visions of making that quick ascent up the Indians' minor league ladder next season, he not only needs to prove he is healthy, but he also needs some improvement with his pitches and mechanics. Since he is shutdown from throwing, one thing he likes to do are towel drills where he holds a rolled up towel in his hand and go through his windup and throwing motion with it. The idea of the drill is to get used to having something in your hand while not physically putting any stress on your arm throwing a baseball.

"With my delivery the big thing for me is if I can get into a rhythm I can command the ball basically where I want to," said Hagadone. "It's when I get out of that rhythm that my command is not so good. So I will work on that this offseason with towel drills. I can always work to improve my fastball command, how tight my slider is, and the feel for my changeup. I always try to improve everything, and I always try to get better and better than the year before."

The offseason has also given Hagadone a chance to reflect on the trade to the Indians.

"We were in Augusta," recalled Hagadone. "I was going out to warm up and then I started to get text messages from a bunch of people because they were seeing the trade speculation on ESPN. So I went and talked to my manager and he said they were not sure what was going to happen but there was a chance I was going to be traded in the Victor Martinez deal. So we talked about

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it for awhile and I came back out, but then ten minutes later our farm director called and told him to tell me. He let me know and I [was in Lake County] the next day.&quot;

Hagadone took the trade in stride, and now looks at it as a great opportunity that has been given to him.

&quot;To be traded for Victor Martinez was a big deal for me,&quot; said Hagadone. &quot;I was really excited about it. I just knew it was going to be a really good opportunity. The Red Sox took care of us really well and I have no complaints about that. But I was really happy to come to the Indians as I feel like there may be a better opportunity here.&quot;

Armed with the stuff he has, Hagadone will certainly get an opportunity with the Indians to show what he can do.