

Instructional League Notebook: 10/12

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, October 12 2009 7:00 PM -

Tony picked up this week and headed out west to Arizona, to observe and report on the Indians action in the Fall Instructional League. While out there, Tony has had an opportunity to kibitz with scouts from all across the league as well as members of the Indians players and personnel development guys. Today we run his first report from out there, which is chock full of all kinds of interesting nuggets about the guys that are the future of the Cleveland Indians franchise.



Having arrived out here in the desert on Sunday - and this time with [no crazy incidents](#) like the one that occurred on my way out here in March - I was able to take in the action on Monday in the Fall Instructional League.

The Indians had morning fielding practice and batting practice at the complex from 9:00am to 10:30am, had lunch, and then players not playing in the afternoon game or only participating in the strength and conditioning program went home. The remaining players stuck around to participate in the 12:30pm games with the Parallel League guys sticking around to play in Goodyear and the Instructional League guys hopping in an army of white shuttle vans to play in Peoria.

Here are some news and notes from my visit on Monday.

Bryson Showing Lots Of Progress

It has been a long year for right-hander Rob Bryson.

Of all the players in the Indians minor league system Bryson has probably spent the most time at the Indians new Player Development Complex in Goodyear, Arizona. His time began in January earlier this year when he reported to the facility to work on his rehab from offseason shoulder surgery, and it continued through spring training in March, extended spring training from April to July, the Arizona League from July to August, and now the Instructional League from September to October.

In August, Bryson almost thought he had earned a reprieve from his long stay in Arizona when he was set to be activated off his rehab assignment and sent to join up with High-A Kinston who was on the road in his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware. Unfortunately, he had a minor setback and the plans to send him to Kinston were nixed.

"We played high school baseball playoff games and other big games there [in Wilmington]," said Bryson. "I live about five minutes from the stadium so I was looking forward to playing there this year, but just didn't make it.

I was going to leave and [be there for a weekend series in August], and then my forearm started bothering me a little bit so they had to shut me down."

Bryson's recovery from offseason shoulder surgery went as planned as he returned to game action in late July. While he did not have a setback with the shoulder he instead ended up being temporarily shut down because of the forearm injury, and injury that came about because he was compensating for the shoulder.

Bryson, who is still only 21 years old, ended up pitching in just three "official" games in the Arizona League going 0-0 with a 12.00 ERA (3.0 IP, 4 H, 2 BB, 5 K). He was still sort of feeling his way through things during his time in the Arizona League games, but now feels like he is close to 100% on the mound.

"Now that Instructs are on the way and I am playing in the Parallel League, really for me the big thing is getting back on the mound and getting some innings and feeling good while I am doing it," said Bryson. "I got a couple of innings in the Arizona League, but I was

kind of fresh off surgery and wasn't feeling too great. I wouldn't say I am feeling 100% now, but I am back to somewhat feeling normal so I am just trying to get back into the swing of things, get used to seeing batters, and then shut it down and be ready for spring training next year."

Bryson no longer has any soreness in the shoulder and feels really good. When healthy, Bryson's fastball sits between 92-94 MPH and has topped out as high as 96 MPH, but when he initially came back from his shoulder surgery he was only topping out at 88-89 MPH.

His arm strength has been slowly improving as he is now back up to sitting in the low 90s and topping out at 93-94 MPH during Instructional League.

"This is the best I have felt since the surgery," said Bryson. "A little by little [my velocity] is coming back.

When I first started throwing to batters I was only hitting in the upper 80s. I am pretty happy with where I am right now.

I am starting to get my arm strength back, and right now it is just getting the feel of my slider and stuff like that.

I think by next year by continuing my throwing program in the offseason my velocity will eventually be back to normal."

Bryson is officially off the rehab list, which means he has no structured throwing sessions or any restrictions on what kind of pitches he can throw, so he is able to throw his slider and changeup at will. However, in the back of any pitcher's mind coming off a serious injury to their shoulder or arm is that they could re-injure themselves. It is a lack of confidence early on in their rehab that results in them holding back some in order not to overexert themselves.

As a result, sometimes pitchers take longer to get the velocity all the way back as they are timid to air it out.

"I think that has a little bit to do with it, just the fear of re-aggravating it and hurting it again," said Bryson. "So I think you are kind of holding back at first. As I start to trust my arm that it is feeling good, I am starting to put a little more into it.

I am still not out there trying to throw the ball as hard as I can, so I am sure if I tried to reach

back it is still there.

But I am just trying to ease into it."

With Instructional League wrapping up here in a couple of days, Bryson will finally be able to pack up and head home to the East Coast for an extended period of time, reflect on his 2009 return to the mound, and get ready for spring training in 2010.

"The plan right now is I will pitch tomorrow (Tuesday) and in our last game on Friday," said Bryson. "Then I will shut it down until December when our throwing program starts back up to get ready for spring training. After this week I think that is it for this season.

Just shut it down while it is feeling good and hopefully come out and compete in spring training."

Bellows Still Transitioning To Third

One of the more interesting picks the Indians made this year in the 2009 Draft was when they selected San Jose State



shortstop Kyle Bellows with their 4th round pick. Unlike last year when the Indians drafted Lonnie Chisenhall in the 1st round of the 2008 Draft and let him remain at shortstop until transitioning him to third base in the offseason, the Indians immediately got to work on the move with Bellows after selecting and signing him.

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"It has gone good," said Bellows. "Having Travis Fryman there in Mahoning Valley - who played 13 years in the big leagues - helped me out and made it an easy transition.

Right now the Indians just want to give me as many innings at third to get used to it."

Bellows showed good progress at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley this year and was solid defensively while showing a lot of power potential in hitting .240 with 7 HR, 32 RBI, and a .716 OPS in 54 games. However, his season was cut short in early August when he came down with a right hand injury when sliding into a base. The injury resulted in him sitting out for most of the final month of the season and through the NY-Penn League playoffs.

"I had a great time [at Mahoning Valley]," said Bellows. "[The injury happened when] I slid back into a base and kind of hooked a guy's leg and I dislocated my finger and fractured my hand."

Kipnis Moves To Second

The Indians are taking a long look at 2009 2nd round pick Jason Kipnis at second base. Clearly , if he can move to second base

it makes him move valuable, and at worst case if he proves he can't play there everyday they feel he can handle playing there on an occasional basis which would add some versatility for him down the road.

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Kipnis has been working at second base all camp, though he just started playing some games there over the weekend. The Indians are currently assessing whether he has the footwork, hands, and comfort level with turning double plays, but so far they are very pleased with what he has shown there and it looks like it will be full steam ahead with him continuing his transition to second base in spring training.

The Indians know he can play the outfield, so if by the end of spring training they don't feel comfortable with him at second base they can just move him back to the outfield.

That all said, it is starting to look like Kipnis could very well be the opening day second baseman at High-A Kinston next year. If Kipnis is able to move to second base full time, his very good bat at a middle of the diamond position would make him very valuable to the Indians as an offensive oriented second baseman.

A Scout's Take On Young Indians

I had a chance to talk to a National League (NL) scout during the morning sessions who was there to get information and



observe players in the Indians system. He has been scouting for 27 years and had several positive things to say about what he saw.

One thing he said immediately jumped out at him watching the Indians players practice and play games the past week is how much arm strength they have among their young position players. He loves Jason Kipnis at second base and thinks if he can stick there he has the bat that could make him explode as a prospect.

He also thinks the move of Kyle Bellows to third base suits him well as he has the frame and body to get bigger and has some good raw power.

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The NL scout also remarked highly on several of the young Latin prospects in camp, namely catcher Alex Monsalve, outfielder Diori Robles and shortstop Jorge Martinez. He couldn't believe Martinez was 16-years old and really liked the arm strength he showed at shortstop, likes his size and body, and feels he has a lot of projection with his bat.

Monsalve has a good arm and is aggressive at the plate, and Robles he feels is someone to keep an eye on going forward.

Notebook

- For those wondering, the Instructional League is indeed still setup with three different camps: Fall Instructional League (FIL),



Fall Developmental League (FDL), and Strength and Conditioning. They had the more established prospects in FDL part of camp, which was the first half of Instructional League and involved players who have been in the system that don't need to be introduced to hitting, fielding and pitching philosophies.

Those players come in and the Indians give them a plan to work on in the offseason and it begins with work in Instructs.

The other portion of camp is the FIL which involves the new players who need to learn all the philosophies and for the organization to get to know the player and figure out what they need to work on.

Instructional League also involves players who need supplemental innings and at bats, and they stay the whole time.

- There has been some speculation by various media sources that the Indians will consider **Tra**

vis Fryman

for the manager opening in Cleveland.

That may be the case, but the vibe I am getting is this is more just people playing a matching game because of his popularity as a player and him being a manager in the Indians' farm system.

It should be noted that Fryman is in Goodyear and is managing the Indians Instructional League team.

That doesn't seem like a guy getting ready to be a manager in the big leagues.

- One of the first things I noticed when watching the morning session practices on Monday was a new guy at shortstop who I did not recognize. After talking to some Indians personnel I learned the player was newly signed Latin shortstop

Jorge Martinez

.
For a kid stateside for the first time and just 16-years old you would never know it as he just oozes confidence on the field.

He made several impressive plays at shortstop during the Instructional League game in the afternoon, and in the morning practice showed off an impressive arm and the ability to hit the ball with the authority which is rare for a player his age.

He is a switch-hitter, an average runner, and has a projectable bat.

The Indians are very high on him, and while they are not commenting publicly yet on the players they signed from Latin America, supposedly he was their biggest catch.

- Right-hander **Trey Haley** took a wicked line drive off his kneecap in the second inning on Monday.
Haley limped around in

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