

## Switch To Bullpen The Wright Move

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Sunday, December 06 2009 7:00 PM -

---

It was a move that was planned almost from the day right-hander Steven Wright was drafted by the Indians in the second round of the 2006 Draft. Coming out of college at the University of Hawaii, Wright was a high profile pitching prospect set to go in the first few rounds of the draft with a dominating fastball and slider but questionable off-speed pitches. As a result, Wright has always projected as more of a reliever than as a starter, and a few weeks into the 2009 season the Indians finally made the move where they converted him from a starter to a reliever. Tony talked to him about it this week.



It was a move that was planned almost from the day right-hander Steven Wright was drafted by the Indians in the second round of the 2006 Draft.

Coming out of college at the University of Hawaii, Wright was a high profile pitching prospect set to go in the first few rounds of the draft. He was a strike thrower, threw a fastball in the low 90s, and featured a slider that many considered one of the best - if not the best - in the entire 2006 Draft. He also threw a curveball and changeup, but the knock was that neither would develop into at least an average pitch where he could remain a starter.

As a result, Wright has always projected as more of a reliever than as a starter, and a few weeks into the 2009 season the Indians finally made the move where they converted him from a starter to a reliever. When the decision was made, it was a welcomed change that he was 100% on board with.

“I love it,” said Wright in a recent interview about the move to the bullpen this past season. “The only thing that is challenging is knowing when

## Switch To Bullpen The Wright Move

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Sunday, December 06 2009 7:00 PM -

---

you are going in and when you are not. It is a fine line as you don't want to wear yourself out if you have to sit down. I think that is the hardest thing is knowing when you are ready for that day and knowing you are going to get six or seven pitches in the game to really get you ready to go.&quot;

One of the things that helped shape the thought that Wright would ultimately be a reliever was his success in the Cape Cod League in 2005 when he pitched out of the bullpen and received the Russ Ford Award as the league's best reliever that year. He followed that up with a junior year at Hawaii where he went 11-2 with a 2.30 ERA in 109.2 innings pitched and walked just 19 batters while striking out 123 batters.

With a very good fastball-slider combination combined with good makeup and that ability to throw strikes, one would have to wonder why the Indians waited so long to transition him to the bullpen. But up until this past season the Indians have always opted to keep their higher end pitching prospects as starters for as long as possible, sometimes not even converting them to a bullpen until they get to Triple-A or even the big leagues. Of late that has changed somewhat as they have been more aggressive in identifying pitchers to convert to the bullpen sooner, and they did it this past season with Wright and a host of other former starters turned relievers.

Wright made three starts to open the 2009 season before being quickly transitioned to the bullpen role. He finished the year with 38 combined appearances between Double-A Akron and Triple-A Columbus and went 10-0 with a 2.48 ERA, and in 87.0 innings he allowed 77 hits, 20 walks, and had 68 strikeouts.

Even though the change came after the start of the season, Wright had no problems adjusting to his new role.

&quot;I honestly don't think it is that much of a change,&quot; said Wright. &quot;If I would have started out of the pen I don't think it would have been much of a difference because for me it was an easy transition. I think the only difference is you don't really know when you are going to pitch, and I kind of like that as I think that plays into my advantage because you get that quick adrenaline boost.&quot;

Wright drew on his experience as a reliever in college to help him with the role change, something other pitchers can have a hard time adjusting to on the fly

## Switch To Bullpen The Wright Move

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Sunday, December 06 2009 7:00 PM -

---

midseason.

"Some guys don't like it because they liked the steady routine of being able to build up into their outing, and that was the one thing that was good about being a starter," said Wright. "But I feel that it is a little bit easier for me to just get up and go because I don't have four days in between to prepare myself for one outing because then if it doesn't go that well you have to wait a whole week [until your next start]. Some guys can't get loose that fast. They can't get thrown into a situation or go on one or no days rest. For me that's all I did in college except for my junior year. Every summer I played I was coming out of the pen, so I was exposed to that."

Prior to the move to the bullpen it was generally felt that Wright's stuff would play up more out of the pen. It was thought that his fastball which typically sat at 89-91 MPH and topped out at 93 MPH as a starter would possibly bump to where it consistently sat at 91-93 MPH. But according to Wright, though his four-pitch arsenal was used to his advantage.

"My velocity [was] the same," said Wright. "I just think that with my ability to be able to throw four pitches it gives me a different game plan every time I see the same team as I can attack them in different ways. If I don't have something working one day I can kind of fall back to something else. I think it kind of helped me out with my slider because I can just go out there and throw it all out for two to three innings and I don't have to worry about trying to get to the sixth inning."

When moving to the bullpen pitchers will often use just a two pitch mix, but Wright never backed off his four pitch repertoire.

"I mix them all in," said Wright about using his four pitches. "It depends on the situation. I usually try to stay with my fastball-slider combination, but I kind of keep [the other pitches] in my back pocket to kind of flip the curveball in to get ahead or even to give them something different to look at with a change of speed and down. I still have my changeup too. I would say the majority of the time though I go out there I throw my fastball-slider and I throw everything off of that."

The next step in Wright's progression as a reliever is getting used to pitching on back to back nights, something that is not afforded to relievers in the minor

## Switch To Bullpen The Wright Move

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Sunday, December 06 2009 7:00 PM -

---

leagues as teams don't want to risk injury to their pitchers and they also want to ensure everyone gets their work in.

"I would like to [go back-to-back], but most of the time when I go out there I throw two innings or a little over an inning," said Wright. "I think I could as I have done it before. It would be a test, and something to see if I can do it. I believe I can as I don't think it is much of a difference, you still have to go out there and throw strikes."

Even with all the success Wright had last year in Akron he only received two short callups to Columbus. On two separate occasions he was called up to Columbus for a quick cup of coffee to fill a short term need, and in the end he spent only a total of six days in Columbus on the season and pitched in two games (5.2 IP, 5 H, 3 ER, 0 BB, 4 K).

In both cases it was explained to Wright that the callup was just temporary, though he certainly deserved to stay in Columbus and show what he could do. While there were so many talented young relievers in Akron, the Indians continued to pick up reliever after reliever off the scrap heap and assign them to Columbus last season. It definitely could be a frustrating situation for a reliever to be a part of, but Wright tried to keep a positive outlook on it.

"The first time I went up they said they needed help, but the second time they said they didn't know," said Wright. "I just [took] it day by day. I honestly [didn't] think about that at all because I think if you start getting caught up in if you will be called up or whatever I think it just kind of gets you distracted from what you really need to do. I just gotta go out there and try to get everybody out and put the pressure on the coaches to make a decision. I think if you start getting caught up in that it makes things more frustrating trying to play GM when that is their job, where my job is to pitch."

Wright is currently home enjoying some time off and working hard to get ready for a pivotal year in his career next season. He also has a chance to be taken in the Rule 5 Draft next Thursday December 10th. As he gets set to go into the 2010 season with aspirations of making a big league roster at some point during the year, it all comes down to him continuing to develop as a reliever and doing one thing.

"Adjustments," said Wright. "Just knowing when you face guys

## Switch To Bullpen The Wright Move

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Sunday, December 06 2009 7:00 PM -

---

everyday over and over again they know what I have, so now it is more about pitching, reading hitters, and making quicker adjustments. I think that is a huge thing for everybody especially out of the pen because you are going to come into a situation where you really don't have that one or two innings to really get settled down like you do as a starter. So it is just being able to come out there right off the bat and being able to throw your fastball down. Just being consistent with that because if you can throw your fastball for strikes everything else just falls in line with it.&quot;

&quot;I am just working to get better everyday.&quot;