

Herrmann Hoping For Big League Chance

Written by {ga=consigliere}

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Right-handed reliever Frank Herrmann has done what so few in professional baseball do, which is to go from being an undrafted free agent signing to becoming a legitimate big league pitching option.

Herrmann, who turns 26 years old later this month, was signed by the Indians after the 2005 Draft when after all 50 rounds no one had signed him. He was on their radar, but because he pitched at Harvard University - a school much more notorious for academics than athletics - teams passed on him. But the Indians used their good rapport between their scouting department and several Ivy League schools to find Herrmann who had slipped between the cracks.

As an undrafted free agent signing, Herrmann was initially viewed more as an organizational player, which is a depth option where like most other undrafted pickups or cheap late round draft signings he would plug gaps in the system where needed for the next few seasons.

But upon coming into the organization and exposing himself to the Indians for the first time, the Indians found out they had something more than just organizational filler and that they had a potential gem in the making. Four years later after a 30-23 record and 3.81 ERA in 127

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appearances at four levels in the organization from 2006-2009, coming into this season Herrmann is on the major league doorstep and hopeful for a big league chance.

"That's what Mark Shapiro told me [this spring] is that I am not at [big league spring training] because I graduated through the system; they think I am legitimate bullpen depth for them," said Herrmann in a recent interview at Huntington Park in Columbus. "So it was nice to hear and hopefully that is the case and I can go up there this year. It has been fun, but I am not where I want to be yet by any means."

So far this season Herrmann is building a great case to be added to the Indians bullpen at some point this year. In nine appearances for Triple-A Columbus he is 1-0 with a 0.75 ERA, and in 12.0 innings has allowed 7 hits, 5 walks, and has 8 strikeouts. He has not surrendered a home run and International League hitters are only batting .171 off of him almost four weeks into the season.

Based on Herrmann's performance to date it appears he is really beginning to settle into his bullpen role, one which was new to him last year. Around this time last season the Indians made the mid-season switch by converting him from a starter to a reliever. They felt his power sinking fastball which comes in at 91-94 MPH along with his size (6'4, 220 LBS), durability, strength, athleticism and consistency would be a good fit in the bullpen role.

Herrmann has power stuff in his arsenal as he also throws a power slider, changeup and a split-finger which was added to his repertoire last year. He doesn't pile up the strikeouts by any means, but instead pitches more to contact and gets hitters to roll over on balls for a lot of groundball outs. He is continuing to work on developing his split-finger, a pitch which could be what makes or breaks his chances to make the big leagues as it would give him a true strikeout pitch.

Though Herrmann fared well in the role last year at Columbus (2.96 ERA, 44 games), he never really got completely comfortable until now.

"I am just continuing to do what I am doing," said Herrmann. "I think last year was about getting used to the bullpen and see how that is and continuing to work on my slider, which I am still doing and I am still throwing the splitter. I am trying to strike out a few more guys, but not at the

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cost of what I do well which is throwing strikes, getting groundballs, and going deeper giving the team some length if they need it."

While Herrmann is very happy pitching in the bullpen, he would never rule out going back to starting.

"I [like the bullpen] just because I have a pretty durable arm where I can throw a little bit more consistently," said Herrmann. "If you have that bad day you can go back out there a day or two later. Starting is kind of like high school football because you wait until the weekend because that is your big day. If you have a bad game you have to sit on it for a week and think about it. I like getting out there a little more frequently and being able to work on things. I would never rule out going back to starting if they said they need me to start. I like that I can do both if they need that flexibility, and I can provide it."

As an undrafted free agent it is a harder road to hoe to get that big league opportunity, especially after the influx of so many high level pitching prospects into the farm system after all the trades last season.

Non-roster invites to big league spring training camp are not easy to come by for players from within the Indians' farm system. The Indians simply don't hand them out to guys just because they will be in Double-A or Triple-A, they give them to the guys who they think can help them at the big league level at some point in the upcoming season. By giving them the invite, it allows the big league coaching staff and front office to get a longer look at them, in some cases their first actual look at them.

"It was awesome and it was a great experience," said Herrmann about his first big league spring training camp he attended this year. "Especially after four minor league camps where you always see those guys doing their own stretch, so it was cool being on the other side and getting a taste. I was telling guys how valuable it is too. If I do get called up this year and get the opportunity, I would feel a lot less intimidated as I faced Vladimir Guerrero and Nelson Cruz already, I was in the locker room

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