

Tomlin On The Hunt

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Thursday, May 06 2010 8:00 PM - Last Updated Thursday, May 06 2010 8:29 PM



When you look at the pitching makeup of the Indians' top two affiliates at Triple-A Columbus and Double-A Akron, the Indians have a lot of good, quality arms. Not many arms of huge impact potential, but good solid pitchers who almost all look like they will someday get a chance to pitch in the big leagues.

At Triple-A Columbus, one of those pitchers a part of that stable of quality young arms is right-hander Josh Tomlin.

Tomlin, 25, is now in the midst of his fifth season pitching in the Indians organization since being taken in the 19th round of the 2006 Draft out of Texas Tech. He's stopped at every level along the way, starting at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley in 2006 to where he is now at Triple-A Columbus.

Even though the pitching depth is pretty deep at the moment in Columbus, Tomlin knows his big league dreams are for the most part out of his hands as all he can control is how he performs and develops as a pitcher. The rest will take care of itself.

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"I'm definitely excited to see how things end up [this year]," said Tomlin in a recent interview at Huntington Park in Columbus. "I know a lot of guys are anxious to get up [to Cleveland], but I also know a lot of guys in Akron are anxious to get up here too. So it will be interesting to see how everything plays out this year."

Tomlin along with just about the rest of the Columbus roster all have their sights set on the big leagues. Everyone on the roster is in the hunt for a big league opportunity this year. For Tomlin - who is an avid hunter - it makes him feel right at home.

"I hunt and fish quite a bit," said Tomlin. "My dad and I used to go camping a lot, and we go riding four wheelers and dirt bikes in Arkansas and Amarillo and all that. My dad and I didn't go that much this offseason, but me and my friend went pretty much every weekend."

In the offseason, Tomlin will often go on hunting trips for one to two weeks at a time which serves as a great getaway from the grind of baseball and helps ease his mind. His favorite spot is a place in south Texas that he and his father-in-law will rent a camper and make an eight to nine hour trek to get to where they hunt a different kind of game, that being deer.

"The biggest one I have ever gotten is an eight point buck in Llano, Texas," said Tomlin. "It's a white tail buck that I guess was about ten inches high. I European mounted it with the skull on a rack."

Tomlin has taken that hunting approach with him on the mound so far in his career. Coming into the season in 114 games (70 starts) he has preyed on opposing teams and hitters to go 43-20 with a 3.32 ERA, 1.7 BB/9, 8.07 K/9, and 1.07 WHIP. All of those numbers are fantastic, which considering he does not have outstanding stuff makes him more of an excellent performer who gets the most out of his abilities.

Tomlin throws a fastball which sits at 90-93 MPH, and complements it with a slider, curveball, and changeup. He doesn't really have a plus pitch, just plus command and control which helps play his stuff up some. He has flipped back and forth the past few years between a starter and reliever as he primarily pitched out of the bullpen in 2008 at High-A Kinston (9-5, 2.98 ERA, 0.96 WHIP, 1.4 BB/9, 9.6 K/9) before moving back to the starting rotation last year at Double-A Akron (14-9, 4.16 ERA, 1.21 WHIP, 1.7 BB/9, 7.8 K/9). This year he opened the season in the

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Columbus bullpen, but with left-hander Scott Lewis going on the shelf, Tomlin was put back into the starting rotation and hasn't skipped a beat.

So far this season in six appearances for Columbus Tomlin is 2-1 with a 3.10 ERA and in 20.1 innings has allowed 13 hits, 6



walks, and has 17 strikeouts. Since allowing five earned runs in 1.2 innings in his season debut back on April 9th, he has allowed just two earned runs in his last 18.2 innings pitched.

"I am not sure exactly how it came about," said Tomlin about the decision to move him back to the bullpen to start this season. "But as long as I getting the ball and throwing and able to pitch and healthy, I am okay with whatever role I am in."

Scouts as well as people in the organizational believe that he is probably best suited in a relief role in the big leagues as his stuff plays up more in the pen since he gets a little more velocity on his fastball being able to air it out for one to two innings. Also, his exceptional walk-strikeout rate will likely translate; it is just a matter of whether his stuff will.

Even though Tomlin has really only pitched out of the bullpen for one season in 2008 at Kinston, he is very comfortable in the role if that is where he is to earn his keep as a big leaguer.

"I did that pretty much the whole year in Kinston except for a few starts I made," said Tomlin. "I have balanced some mechanical issues I have had out of the bullpen as I felt like I was trying do too much out of the bullpen. You always hear how your stuff plays up better out of the bullpen and all that, so you try to make it a little better as opposed to letting everything happen as it did as a starter. I am trying to stay within myself and not lean back. My direction is key for me and getting everything going toward home plate. That's what I have been working on and hopefully that can translate into a game."

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Tomlin is one of the top non-roster pitchers in the system that could help the Indians at the big league level at some point this season or next. Pitching in Triple-A he is getting an opportunity to face hitters with big league experience, something you typically don't face at all at Double-A and below as those rosters are almost strictly made up of prospects or career minor leaguers.

"I think it is a little bit different," said Tomlin about pitching in Triple-A. "You have more veteran guys and a couple guys who belong in the big leagues because there is no room. The hitters are obviously a little more patient than they were in Double-A. I feel like especially the first month you have guys who are not in the big leagues because of not enough room up there, so a lot of them are going to be strong off the bat. It's going to be a task to make an adjustment, but in order to pitch at the next level you have to do it."

By facing some big league veterans it gives Tomlin a small sampling of what to expect at the big league level.

"I think that the more guys you face with big league experience, the more experience you gain from it as a pitcher," said Tomlin. "You just go in there and think this is what you are going to face day in and day out in the big leagues, and I feel like the better they are the better it makes you."

Tomlin obviously has big league aspirations, but in order to get there he has to continue to put up a good showing in Columbus this year. Who knows, if he continues to perform as he has and the Indians continue to have issues in the bullpen with walks, maybe they give him a shot later in the season.

"I just want to show consistency in the bullpen or starting, whatever they have me do," said Tomlin. "I just want to be able to log innings, pitch deep into games, or be able to keep our team in the game and late in the game to be able to win. Whatever I can do to help the team win is my goal."

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