

## Jones Could Fill Bullpen Void

Written by {ga=consigliere}

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The Cleveland Indians need left-handed relievers.

Rafael Perez and Tony Sipp continue to struggle at the big league level. Jeremy Sowers is the only left-handed relief option at Triple-A Columbus, and he has had problems adapting to the new role (1-4, 6.26 ERA, 17 games). And at Double-A Akron there are no left-handed relievers, though at some point many feel Nick Hagadone could be moved into such a role.

With left-handed relief pitching being a scarce resource for the Indians at the big league and upper levels of the minors, it makes it all the more important for some of the young left-handers in the lower levels to step up and be noticed.

A left-handed reliever who may be entering into the picture for the Indians is Chris Jones, who in 19 combined appearances between High-A Kinston and Low-A Lake County is 3-3 with a 1.85 ERA and in 48.2 innings has allowed 36 hits, 12 walks, and has 40 strikeouts. He is the only left-handed reliever on the Kinston staff, which further shows the lack of bullpen left-handed options in the system. Right now, today, he is arguably the top left-handed relief prospect in the system, partly because of his performance to date and talent, but also because of a lack of options.

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Prior to this year, the 21 year old Jones had been a starter or pitched as a quasi-starter in a piggyback role. He is making the conversion to a full time reliever this season and has really taken to the role change well. He's proven to be just as tough on righties (.208 AVG) as he has been on lefties (.193 AVG) this year, though has been much more dominant against lefties (12.79 K/9) than righties (5.15 K/9).

"It's been a lot of fun and I am doing really well," said Jones in a recent interview. "I think I am adapting to the relieving role really well and better than I thought I would. I was kind of worried [with my arm] about having to warm up fast and stuff like that, but my arm feels great. I really feel good, and I am really proud of what's going on."

Jones throws a standard three pitch mix of a fastball, curveball and changeup. The fastball sits in the low 90s and the curveball is a plus offering and considered the best pitch in his arsenal. The changeup has some good sink and fade, but is still not an average offering for him, which is why with his fastball-curveball mix he may be best suited in a relief role.

With his deceptive, unconventional delivery and very good curveball Jones can be tough on lefties and with more development could become even tougher. Knowing that, he welcomes the change to the bullpen as he knows it may be his best path to the big leagues.

"I think I am going to stay as a reliever," said Jones. "I can also go a little longer where if they need me for four or five innings [I can do that too]."

The biggest change for Jones this year has been the increased use of his curveball. It may sound strange that he has barely used his best pitch, but that was the case last year and earlier this year in Lake County where the Indians had him focus mostly on throwing his fastball and changeup. The minor leagues are all about development, so sometimes you are forced to shelve your best stuff in order to work on and improve your weaknesses.

"I have been kind of mixing in my curveball more [here at Kinston]," said Jones. "Down in Lake County I didn't use my curveball very much where here I have to use it a little bit more. So I am probably going to have to throw that for strikes a little bit more instead of using it as an out pitch."

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That's going to be a big key for me to be as successful up here as I was in Lake County."

This is Jones' second stint with Kinston as he got a small taste of life in the Carolina League last year when he was promoted the last few weeks of the season. He made four starts for Kinston last year and went 1-1 with a 7.50 ERA (18.0 IP, 22 H, 8 BB, 21 K), and used it as a learning experience even though he felt like he pitched better than the numbers indicate.

"My first outing [last year in Kinston] was great and I think I went six innings and gave up two hits and no runs," recalled Jones. "After that I would go three innings and then just straight blow it and that is how it went in my last three starts. I think I was tired, and I am going to keep that in my head as it will give me some confidence as I know I am not tired now. I think my arm is a little bit more used to [pitching in a full season] now, and now I am not throwing as many innings, so it makes it easier."

It looks like Jones has found a home in the bullpen, which is great because the Indians have a need there. He loves the role, but understands at a moments notice things can change.

"Don't get me wrong, I love starting, but I really love relieving," said Jones. "This is my first time really staying in relief and not piggybacking. I feel like I am more in the game, and I am always on the field and I don't have to worry about [charting pitches] in the stands or anything."

"I like it a lot, but it's not up to me though."