

Stowell Is Blazing A Path To Big Leagues

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Sunday, July 18 2010 8:22 AM - Last Updated Sunday, July 18 2010 8:26 AM



Triple-A Columbus right-handed reliever Bryce Stowell was drafted by the Cleveland Indians just two years ago in the 22nd round of the 2008 Draft out of UC-Irvine. He was a draft eligible sophomore and 21 years old, so he had the option of returning to college for another year or two, but the Indians pried him out of college with a \$725,000 bonus.

Right now, that is looking like money well spent.

This season Stowell is in the midst of a breakout campaign where he is dominating at every level. He began the season at High-A Kinston and in 11 appearances was 1-0 with a 1.42 ERA. In 25.1 innings he held opposing hitters to a .186 average and had 41 strikeouts. He was quickly promoted to Double-A Akron in mid-May and he took off from there. In 14 appearances with Akron he went 1-0 with 7 saves and a 0.00 ERA. In 22.1 innings he held opposing batters to a .192 average and had 33 strikeouts.

Stowell, 23, was just recently promoted to Columbus and in three appearances there has pitched five shutout innings and allowed just two hits, three walks and has seven strikeouts. Overall this year he has amassed some very impressive numbers as in 28 appearances he is 2-0 with 7 saves and a 0.68 ERA. In 52.2 innings he has allowed just 33 hits, 22 walks, and has 81 strikeouts. Opposing hitters are batting just .183 against him, and he has a 1.04 WHIP, 3.8 BB/9, and 13.1 K/9.

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Things are much different so far this year for Stowell as compared to the season he had last year. Last season he battled bicep tendonitis for the first two months of the season and he just never seemed to get on track and had a so-so season statistically where he split time in the bullpen and starting rotation. In 22 combined appearances between Low-A Lake County and Kinston he went 4-6 with a 4.76 ERA and in 70.0 innings opposing batters hit .255 off him and he had 77 strikeouts.

Stowell used his unspectacular showing last year as motivation to come into this year and have the best season possible.

"To be honest with you it was the first time I really got injured before in my career [last season], and I really did not feel 100% right off the bat," said Stowell in a recent interview with the IPI. "I am not making any excuses, but things just generally did not go the way I planned. So coming into this spring training I focused more on my approach and attitude towards everything and have turned it around. So far it is going pretty well. As long as I can stick to my approach, routine and work ethic, that's all you can ask for."

For the Indians, they always thought Stowell had the talent, but that he just went through an adjustment process in his first pro season in 2009, which maybe helps explain the average numbers and early health issues.

"Bryce has had a great year," said Indians Director of Player Development Ross Atkins. "Last year he was coming off of a very, very full amateur workload, so we probably did not see all of him in his first full professional season and he was pitching in a piggyback situation. He is a pretty high profile college pitcher that we were fortunate to get in the 2008 Draft. I think the introduction to professional baseball, the work in the offseason, his commitment to his body, and his commitment to the process has allowed him to really benefit from what professional baseball offers...he is really a great story and someone who has had a great 2010."

Last year Stowell consistently threw 91-93 MPH and touched 95 MPH, though it was felt he had the ability to add velocity as he refined his mechanics, developed a routine, and moved to the bullpen. He has done that this year as he has seen a significant spike in his velocity where he is consistently sitting at 95 MPH and has officially touched 99 MPH. He also allegedly touched 100 MPH in his last appearance with Akron.

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There is no doubt that the velocity increase has been a huge key to the success Stowell has had so far this year, though another key is his more consistent strike throwing. He is allowing less walks this year (4.8 BB/9 in 2009, 3.8 BB/9 in 2010), and more importantly he is getting ahead of batters early in the count so he can go to work against them.

"I think the main thing is just getting strike one, and if not strike one then getting strike one as quickly as possible," said Stowell. "It's a different situation when you are ahead in the count as opposed to crawling back from 1-0 or 2-0, so I think the more I can get ahead obviously the more opportunity I can get myself in to have success."

Stowell has not made any significant mechanical adjustments this year, but he has worked a lot on a changeup, a pitch he is throwing with a lot more confidence this year. His fastball and slider are both considered plus pitches and out pitches at the big league level, so the changeup is not that important, especially as a reliever. But, he likes the different look the changeup gives hitters and that it adds another wrinkle to his arsenal to keep hitters guessing a little more.

"I have been working on a changeup a lot, and I am starting to throw that with a lot of confidence," said Stowell. "It has been great. I worked on it a lot in the offseason and that was pretty much the biggest thing I wanted to come into spring training ready to go with. Once that happened my mind and outlook on pitching as a whole changed. For a long time I have been pegged as a two pitch pitcher, and throwing this changeup you are getting a lot of different looks from hitters. So the more I can throw it and show it to hitters they will have to contend with it. The more I can stay consistent with it, the better."

From the day the Indians drafted Stowell they viewed him as an impact caliber big league bullpen arm. Like they do with a lot of their high profile relief pitching prospects they had him pitch in the starting rotation for much of last season mostly to help facilitate the development of his pitches and routine as well as expose him to as many game situations as possible. It is a role that he is more than happy to be in.

"Yeah, I have no complaints with it," said Stowell. "Whatever the Indians want me to do obviously I will do it as best I can and just go about my business. So I think the more I can get into my comfort zone as soon as possible no matter what role they have me in and see what happens from there. But as far as things go right now, everything is going well."

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Now that Stowell is in Columbus, he is just one last big step away from the big leagues. That said, he very likely will not make that step this year as the Indians likely will have him finish off the season with Columbus to finish him off and have him be a major league option right from the start of next season. There is no rush to push him to Cleveland this year, especially since he is still a year away from roster protection, not to mention the Indians still have to sift through several other bullpen options to see who they should keep after this season.

Had the Indians been contending right now it would be a different story as Stowell would certainly be getting strong consideration for a callup, but since they are not they can sit back and wait until next year. That doesn't bother him as he knows things are out of his control. He knows that all he can do is control the way he pitches and that he has no control over the decisions the front office makes with moving players up and down in the system.

"You definitely set goals for yourself," said Stowell. "As far as places to go I have never done that. Coming into my first spring training [in 2009] I told myself never to set a timeline on myself where I need to be here by this time or do this by this age, I just feel you can get into a lot of trouble that way."

For Stowell, while the big league picture is certainly in view, he is focused on what he has to do to help his chances to not only get there, but stick there.

"As far as myself, sure, you set goals," said Stowell. "Getting ahead of every batter, limiting your walks...small stuff like that. Obviously I have the big picture in mind, but the more I can focus on the day to day routine and what can I do today to get better what can I do today to help the team as best as I can, I think that's what you need to focus on. Everything out of your control is out of your control and you can only do with what you can. I think with this being my second season I am really starting to realize that. I think the more I can grasp that and go with it, the better off I will be."

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