

## 2010 Tony Awards: Biggest Breakthrough

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Tuesday, October 12 2010 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 12 2010 6:23 AM

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We continue on with the final few year end Cleveland Indians minor league player awards. To recap, here are the awards so far:

[Offensive Player of the Year: Jason Kipnis](#)

[Pitcher of the Year: Joe Gardner](#)

[Reliever of the Year: Cory Burns](#)

[Defensive Player of the Year: Roberto Perez](#)

[Comeback Player of the Year: Jared Goedert](#)

[Rookie of the Year: Felix Sterling](#)

Today we continue the postseason awards with the announcement of the Biggest Breakthrough performer. This award goes to the player who may not have been is highly touted coming into the season on prospect lists, but by the end of the season is definitely on the prospect map and should be ranked as a Top 50 ranked prospect going into next season.

This is an award that the nominees are 100% based on performance as prospect standing is not factored in; however, when deciding a winner among the nominees their prospect standing after the season is certainly factored in. Again, these awards are simply for fun to hand out at the end of the year. Also, the Cleveland Indians in no way whatsoever had any input in these awards. In the coming days the Biggest Disappointment and the All-Tony Team will be announced.

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### Biggest Breakthrough Nominees:

#### **Austin Adams (RHP – Lake County/Kinston)**

8-5, 2.49 ERA, 26 G, 112.0 IP, 90 H, 12 HR, 36 BB, 112 K, 1.13 WHIP, 3.6 BB/9, 9.0 K/9

Maybe not a huge breakthrough as I had Adams as a Top 50 prospect coming into the 2010 season, but I would still expect him to move up around the 25-30 range for next season. He pitched in a piggyback role in 2010 and may continue that role next year, though at some point is expected to move into the bullpen which is where he has always been projected to pitch when he reached the higher levels. He was pretty raw and inexperienced as a pitcher coming into the pros but has shown a lot of development and is a legit bullpen prospect going forward.

#### **Cory Burns (RHP – Lake County/Kinston)**

1-2, 1.96 ERA, 42 S, 54 G, 55.0 IP, 43 H, 2 HR, 14 BB, 81 K, 1.04 WHIP, 2.3 BB/9, 13.3 K/9

You will be hard pressed to find any publication coming into the season who took Burns very seriously as a relief prospect, but that is no longer the case after the year he had in 2010. His funky delivery, good command, and nasty knuckle-curveball gave opposing hitters fits all year. He still lacks dominating stuff and has relied a lot on deception at Single-A, so he still needs to prove himself at a higher level before he truly jumps into the bullpen prospect discussion. That said he has certainly jumped into the Indians Top 50 prospect listing for next year.

#### **Chun Chen (C – Lake County/Kinston)**

.315 AVG, 58 R, 38 2B, 3 3B, 12 HR, 69 RBI, 55 BB, 74 K, 5 SB, .924 OPS

Chen went from a guy who going into 2009 was viewed as an up-and-comer to a forgotten guy going into 2010 because of the poor season at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley in 2009. In 2010 his impressive stroke and approach at the plate returned, and he probably more than exceeded expectations for even the Indians themselves. While he showed growth as a catcher this year, it remains to be seen if he stays there and does not end up at first base down the road. He should be ranked somewhere in the Top 30 next year.

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### **Joe Gardner (RHP – Lake County/Kinston)**

13-6, 2.75 ERA, 28 GS, 147.1 IP, 102 H, 6 HR, 62 BB, 142 K, 1.11 WHIP, 3.8 BB/9, 8.7 K/9

Gardner had about as good of a pro debut as you can possibly have with some very impressive numbers to go along with some interesting stuff as his hard sinking fastball was trouble for opposing hitters all year. It's still unclear what kind of prospect he will be, and next year will go a long way at proving that at Double-A Akron against some top level competition. Even still, he has improved his stock immensely from a prospect ranked in the 50s coming into the season to one who will definitely be in the Top 20 going into next season.

### **Jared Goedert (3B – Akron/Columbus)**

.283 AVG, 80 R, 37 2B, 1 3B, 27 HR, 83 RBI, 53 BB, 112 K, 4 SB, .890 OPS

Goedert actually was nominated for this award after the 2007 season. It may seem a bit strange to nominate him for the same award again, but considering where he was coming into the season barely holding onto a job to where he is now as a potential big league option next year, it seems perfectly acceptable to nominate him again. He showed the biggest power in the farm system this year, which is something the Indians can certainly use at the big league level if they can find a position for him. He should now be ranked somewhere in the Indians Top 30 next year.

### **Matt Packer (LHP – Lake County/Akron)**

9-7, 2.04 ERA, 30 G, 132.2 IP, 112 K, 7 HR, 22 BB, 123 K, 0.99 WHIP, 1.4 BB/9, 8.5 K/9

Packer had a completely out of nowhere performance this season. For an unheralded 33<sup>rd</sup> round pick, it would have been impressive had he done what he did this year in a bullpen role, but considering he did it mostly as a starter since about late May it makes it ten times more impressive. He even skipped High-A Kinston altogether and finished the season at Double-A Akron where he more than held his own, which is where he should open the season next year. He was unranked as a prospect coming into the season, but will be in the Top 20 next season.

### **Bryce Stowell (RHP – Kinston/Akron/Columbus)**

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3-1, 2.14 ERA, 42 G, 7 S, 67.1 IP, 42 H, 4 HR, 36 BB, 102 K, 1.16 WHIP, 4.8 BB/9, 13.6 K/9

Stowell was always considered a hard thrower coming out of college, but I am not sure the velocity spike he had this season was ever expected as he was consistently in the upper 90s and actually touched 100 MPH in his last appearance at Double-A Akron before a promotion to Triple-A Columbus. Coming off a poor 2009 season where he struggled with health and inconsistency, he came into the season as a lowly ranked prospect in the 50s; however, his stock jumped big time this year where he will find himself in the Top 20 next year.

### And the 2010 Tony Award goes to...Matt Packer

Gardner was a 3<sup>rd</sup> round pick in 2009, and while Stowell was a 22<sup>nd</sup> rounder in 2008 he came with a \$725,000 price tag, so it is hard to consider them true breakthrough players since both were highly regarded pitchers coming out of the draft. Adams had a very nice season, though his ceiling is as a reliever so it hurts him in this case when comparing him to the other nominees. Chen and Goedert had great offensive seasons, but were overshadowed here by some outstanding pitching performances. Burns also had a very good season, but like Adams his ceiling is as a reliever and there are still some question marks on his true value as a prospect.

When it comes down to it, Packer's outstanding season mostly as a starter and now projected as one going forward makes him a clear runaway winner for this award. His excellent command, ability to command four different pitches, and his very promising showing at Double-A Akron has him now being considered as a legitimate big league pitching prospect.

As a 32<sup>nd</sup> round pick in 2009, Packer came into this season as an afterthought to many outside of the Indians organization, but no more. He opened the season in the bullpen, but showed some impressive stuff in his bullpen sessions and in games to where the Indians decided to move him to the rotation to see how he would do...and the rest as they say is history. His emergence as a starting pitching option for the Indians in the near future was one of the biggest stories of the year.

Packer very likely will open the 2011 season in the starting rotation at Akron, but where things go from there is unknown. The Indians will likely give him most of next season at Akron both

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because of development reasons and also because of an expected backload of starters at Columbus to start the season.

Remember, it was just one great season, so Packer will need to put together another good year next season from a development and performance perspective to truly be considered the real deal. He may see some time at Columbus later in the year, and if things go well could be a starting pitching or bullpen option for the Indians sometime in 2012.

**Up Next:** Biggest Disappointment

*Photo courtesy of Lianna Holub*

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