



The elite Arizona Fall League threw out its first pitch yesterday, beginning a quick 30-game season for some of the top prospects from around baseball. This year's #1 overall pick, Gerrit Cole, is scheduled to play, as are megapropects Mike Trout and Bryce Harper. As The Indians don't have anyone on that level heading down to the desert, but let's take a look at the eight players (not including coach Mickey Callaway) the Tribe will send down to play for the Phoenix Desert Dogs.

Corey Burns, RP: Burns served as the closer for AA Akron this year, and by any statistical measurement had a great season. He went 2-5 with 35 saves, a 2.11 ERA and struck out 70 hitters while walking 15 in his 59 2/3 IP for the Aeros. Burns doesn't have overpowering stuff, but the former University of Arizona product makes up for it with an extremely funky delivery that makes it difficult for hitters to pick up the ball coming out of his hand. If you've never seen it before, Burns has a motion almost like former Dodger import Hideo Nomo, where he turns his back completely to the hitter in the middle of his windup. It remains to be seen if the delivery will continue to fool hitters at higher levels, but Burns has had a lot of success in Lake County, Kinston and now Akron. His 35 saves in 2011 tied him for the organizational lead.

Preston Guilmet, RP: The organization co-leader in saves with 35 was Kinston's Preston Guilmet. Also a former Arizona Wildcat, Guilmet was both a midseason and postseason all star selection by the Carolina League. He went 1-1 with the 35 saves, a 2.16 ERA and 60 strikeouts against just 11 walks in 58 1/3 IP for the K-Tribe. Stop me if you've heard this before, but Guilmet doesn't have typical "closer stuff," as his fastball barely reaches 90 MPH. Like Burns,

he has a deceptive delivery where he delivers the ball from an extremely high release point, and that release point gives him not only deception but makes for devastating action on his splitter. He does a nice job locating his fastball and his secondary stuff has been good enough to get hitters out in the Carolina League. And again, like Burns, it remains to be seen if his deception and offspeed stuff will be enough to retire more advanced hitters.

T.J. McFarland, SP: Each team is allowed to designate one pitcher as their starter in Arizona, and for the Indians that will be McFarland. T.J. began 2011 in the Kinston rotation, but as quickly promoted to AA Akron where he would remain for the rest of the season. The 22-year old starter went 9-9 for Akron, posting a solid 3.87 ERA while striking out 103 and walking 50 in 137 1/3 IP. With Joe Gardner traded out of the organization, McFarland undoubtedly has the best sinker in the Indians minor league system, and he used the pitch to post an impressive 2.48 GO/AO ratio in Akron this year. He's not a big strikeout guy, but can pitch to contact with his sinker and has a great chance to be a middle of the rotation starter down the road. He's a durable lefty that will take the ball every 5th day and go out and pitch his heart out for you, and it's a lot of fun to watch him compete. Hopefully, McFarland can turn in a strong AFL campaign and use it as a springboard to an impressive season in AAA like fellow southpaw Scott Barnes did last year.

Tyler Sturdevant, RP: Pitching in the role of setup man, Sturdevant saw action in Kinston, Akron and even a few innings in Columbus in 2011. Between all three levels, he went 7-3 with 4 saves, and posted a 2.65 ERA with an impressive 82 strikeouts and 19 walks in 74 2/3 IP. The 25-year old righty is doing his best to move up in the crowded field of relievers that the Indians have in the system, and a successful campaign in the hitter-friendly AFL would help open some eyes in the organization.

Roberto Perez, C: One of my favorite players in the organization, Perez is one of the top defensive catchers in all of minor league baseball. He has quick feet, a lightning-fast release, and

is an elite receiver. Unfortunately, his work at the plate pales to his work behind it. Perez played all of 2011 for the Kinston Indians, and put up a line of .225/.365/.310 with just 2 HR and 30 RBI. Perez does have a solid approach, as he managed to walk 62 times in 94 games last year. He may never hit enough to be an everyday starter in the big leagues, but he could play defensively in the majors right now. Pitchers rave about his skills behind the dish, as besides controlling the opposing teams running game Perez calls a great game and manages his staff well. Perez actually played in the AFL last year, so he'll be a repeat visitor to Arizona. He's one of four catchers on the Dogs roster, so it remains to be seen just how much playing time he'll receive.



Jesus Aguilar, 1B: Big, Bad Jesus Aguilar is the youngest player on the Desert Dogs roster at just 21 years of age. Listed at 6'3"/241, Aguilar actually looks bigger than that. He has tremendous raw power which he showcased this year in Lake County, hitting 19 HR in 349 at bats in the Midwest League. His overall line for the Captains was .292/.370/.544 with the 19

bombs and 69 RBI.

He was promoted to Kinston, and held his own in one of the more difficult hitting environments in the minor leagues. In 113 Carolina League at bats, BBJA put up a solid .257/.323/.389 line with 4 HR and 13 RBI. To put that in perspective, the .712 OPS would have been good for 19th in the league and 2nd on the team if Aguilar had enough at bats to qualify. He has as much power potential as anyone in the Indians minor league system, and it will be fun to see what he can do in the hitter friendly environment of Arizona, albeit against more advanced pitching than he's seen so far in his career.

Tim Fedroff, OF: Fedroff had a breakout 2011 season, starting with AA Akron and finishing up in AAA Columbus. In 70 games for the Aeros, Fedroff hit .338/.399/.447 with 2 HR, 35 RBI and 7 SB. He led the Eastern League in hitting for much of the 1st half before getting promoted to Columbus in June. With the Clippers, Fedroff hit .272/.370/.362 with one HR and 28 RBI in 62 games. As the numbers indicate, the 24-year old lefthanded hitter isn't much of a power threat, but he has top of the order on-base skills, and does a good job barreling the baseball. He had an even 35/35 strikeout/walk ratio with the Clippers, showing an advanced approach for the level. He runs well but isn't a speed demon, has a decent arm but not a cannon. He can play all three outfield positions, but is probably best suited to LF. He's probably best suited to be a solid 4th

OF on a good team rather than an everyday starter.

Chad Huffman, 1B/OF: The former 2nd round pick of the San Diego Padres is rapidly losing his chance to become a major league hitter. Huffman turns 27 in April, and has played just 9 games in the major leagues (for the Yankees in 2010). His best minor league season was in 2009 with the AAA Portland Sea Dogs, when he hit 20 HR and posted an .830 OPS. Since then though, it's been downhill for Huffman, and with AAA Columbus this year he went for a .246/.351/.415 line with 14 HR and 58 RBI. He's an extremely streaky hitter who can really tear things up for a week or two, and then all but disappear for the next three.

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