



Well sports fans, it's that time of year again. The clocks have changed, the sun is shining, spring training is in action, there's only a few snowfalls left for the North Coast; it's prospect countdown time . The Cleveland Indians have an...interesting minor league system right now. Four of the top five players on last year's list are no longer eligible for the list, as Jason Kipnis and Lonnie Chisenhall graduated to the majors in 2011 and Drew Pomeranz and Alex White were dealt to the Rockies for Ubaldo Jiminez.

The fifth player in my top 5 last year didn't throw a single pitch due to injury issues (Jason Knapp). So a system that was considered last year to be extremely deep with a few top guys is now more or less just a deep system. The Indians still have a lot of talent in the pipeline, but there is really only one blue-chip guy. They did the best they could to infuse talent in last June's MLB draft, signing several players to overslot deals including 2<sup>nd</sup> round pick Dillon Howard, but there's only so much a team can do in one draft.

The one thing that really stands out is just how far from the majors most of these guys are. AAA Columbus has a number of quality bullpen arms and a couple of starters that could pitch in the majors in 2012, but most of the talented position players are years away. That means that while Low-A Lake County will be a fun team to watch this year, the cavalry is not on the horizon should something happen at the big league level.

One of the strengths of the system last year than was maintained through to 2012 is the abundance of quality bullpen arms that have the talent to pitch in the major leagues. C.C. Lee, Nick Hagadone, Rob Bryson, Tyler Sturdevant, Bryce Stowell...all of these guys have the potential to be impact arms in the back end of a major league bullpen. As a note, relief pitchers

Zach Putnam, Josh Judy, Cory Burns and Adam Miller would have all been on this list if they were still in the organization, with Putnam ranking in the top-15. Even after dealing some of their bullpen depth, the Indians have a plethora of arms to plug into the major league bullpen should the need arise.



Another strength of the system is young, tootsy infielders. Francisco Lindor, Tony Wolters, Ronny Rodrigues, Robel Garcia, Dorssys Paulino, Jorge Martinez...all of these guys are young, raw and oozing with talent. The highest level any of them will play at in 2012 is likely high-A, with some not even getting out of the complex leagues. None of them played a single inning of college baseball. So while these kids are all quite a ways away from contributing at the big league level, it doesn't take away from the impressive collection of infield talent the Indians have been able to stockpile between the draft and international free agency over the past couple of years.

This is going to be a really, really fun year to follow the Cleveland minor league system. Even with a relative lack of elite, top level talent, there are a lot of guys who are solid breakout candidates. As always, I highly recommend getting out to as many games as you can, because the raw athleticism of these kids is simply not going to show up in the box scores. Francisco Lindor ranging up the middle and throwing a strike on the run to nail a runner by half a step isn't a category on Baseball-Reference.com. There are so many young, exciting, athletic kids in the

system, especially in nearby Lake County, that you really have to get out and see them. There's a chance that this system could still be in the 20's overall next year, but there's also a really good chance that a few of these guys make the leap to become well-regarded prospects and the system breaks out to be back in the top half of baseball.

Because of the young and unproven nature of the talent in the Indians system, it was extremely difficult to rank. I considered about 65 players for my top 51 countdown, and even when I was finally able to settle on the 51, I moved them around quite a bit throughout the process. I'll be seeing several of these guys for the first time when I head down to Goodyear next week for my annual Spring Training trip, which is something I'm (obviously) really looking forward to. I had a lot of fun putting together this list, and I really hope you enjoy reading it. And yes, you read that right; we're counting down 51 prospects here at The Cleveland Fan, not just 50. Much like Kevin Goldstein and his top-11 and top-101 lists, I'm going the extra mile to provide you with the best coverage that your money can buy. Before we kick off the countdown though, let's take a look at some of the "bests" throughout the system:

Best Defensive Catcher: Roberto Perez

Best Defensive Infielder: Francisco Lindor

Best Defensive Outfielder: Luigi Rodriguez

Best Outfield Arm: Carlos Moncrief

Best Power: Jesus Aguilar

Best Hit Tool: Francisco Lindor

Best Speed: Luigi Rodriguez

Most Intriguing Prospect: Dorssys Paulino

Deepest Position: Bullpen arms

Shallowest Position: Corner infielders

2011 Top 50:

1. Jason Kipns

2. Lonnie Chisenhall

3. Drew Pomeranz

4. Jason Knapp

5. Alex White

6. LeVon Washington

7. Nick Weglarz

8.Chun Chen

9.Joe Gardner

10.Cord Phelps

11.Bryce Stowell

12.Rob Bryson

13.Zach Putnam

14.Tony Wolters

15.Hector Rondon

16.Alex Lavisky

17.Kelvin De La Cruz

18.Nick Hagadone

19.Scott Barnes

20.C.C. Lee

21.Austin Adams

22.Kyle Blair

23.T.J. House

24.Vinnie Pestano

25.Tyler Holt

26.Josh Judy

27.Jordan Henry

28.Bryan Price

29.Cory Burns

30.Matt Packer

31.Jared Goedert

32.Cory Kluber

33.Abner Abreu

34.Gio Urshela

35.Gio Soto

36.Felix Sterling

37.Jess Todd

38.Kyle Bellows

39.Juan Romero

40.Clayton Cook

41.Bo Greenwell

42.Alexander Perez

43.T.J McFarland

44.Jeremie Tice

45.Cole Cook

46.Preston Gulimet

47.Chris Jones

48.Zach McAllister

49.Matt McBride

50.Roberto Perez

So check back tomorrow for prospects 51-45, and every day for the next 10 days as we countdown to number one.

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