What a piece this has been. I've always liked reading Baseball America's Indians minor league prospect rankings & profiles, but Lastoria has trumped them here. Today, Tony finishes off his detailed top 35 Tribe prospect ratings with a thorough look at his Top Five. Big ups to Tony for doing this for us, as this is a piece we will look back on and reference all season.

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5. Scott Lewis: Left-handed Pitcher

Age: 23 Height: 6'0" Weight: 185 Bats: Switch Throws: Left

Stats & Stuff: Once again, the Indians gambled on an injured player and drafted Lewis in the 3rd round of the 2004 Draft out of The Ohio State University. At Ohio State, Lewis was a dominant pitcher, as his sophomore season in 2003 he went 9-1 with a 1.61 ERA and struck out 127 batters in just 84 innings pitched, and won Big Ten Pitcher of the Year honors. But, while he has a history of being a dominating pitcher, he also has a history of injury. After his brilliant 2003 season at Ohio State, he was being considered as a first round possibility in the 2004 Draft; however, he later suffered a severe arm injury that resulted in Tommy John surgery and resulted in him missing a lot of the 2004 season. The injury problems have followed him to the minor league circuit, as prior to the 2006 season he had been limited to only a total of 21 IP in 2004 and 2005 at Mahoning Valley, going 0-3 with a 4.71 in 10 games over those two seasons. Finally healthy, last year Lewis went 3-3 with a 1.48 ERA in 27 starts

last year at Kinston, and held opponents to a .203 average and struckout 123 in 115.2 IP. With his 1.48 ERA, Lewis won the Minor League ERA Title with the best ERA in all the minors.

The Good: The Indians handled Lewis with kid gloves last year, and it worked as he managed to stay healthy all year. Probably the biggest positive all season was that Lewis was able to take the ball every fifth day and handle his workload. Lewis didn't figure into very many decisions last year because he was on a strict 70-pitch count all season, which was mandated by the Indians because he was still recovering from the Tommy John surgery in 2003 and bicep tendonitis which had plagued him since 2005. The strict pitch count also helped him build up arm strength. The Indians were most encouraged last year with the progress Lewis made in recovering from Tommy John surgery, specifically the aggressiveness in releasing the ball.

To the casual observer, his high strikeout rate and low walk-hit rate may seem to indicate he throws some serious heat; however, this is not the case with Lewis. Lewis has a fastball that only tops out in the 87-90 MPH range consistently, but it was the tremendous command of his secondary pitches that made his fastball play up and look faster. The power and depth he has added to his nasty 12-6 curveball was a key for him last year, and his curveball is now rated as the best in the system. Lewis also has good arm action, and good deception throughout his delivery. His changeup has developed into a plus pitch, and he gets a lot of action on his pitches in the strike zone.

The Bad: Health. That's the key word with Lewis, as if he is healthy, he is an amazing pitcher. While he was healthy last year, Lewis needs to prove he can be a durable pitcher and stay on the field for the Indians. Also, Lewis does not throw hard, so he will need to depend on his excellent command and secondary pitches to get more advanced hitters out on a regular basis. Lewis also needs to become better at repeating his delivery and ironing out some flaws in his delivery mechanics.

The Outlook: Last year, Lewis made 27 starts and did not suffer any setbacks. Because of his strict pitch count and a smaller pitching roster at Akron, Lewis was held back at Kinston all year because his 4-5 inning starts would be too taxing on the Akron bullpen. This year, Lewis will move up to Akron and a step closer to the major leagues.

4. Brian Barton: Outfielder

Age: 24 Height: 6’3” Weight: 190 Bats: Right Throws: Right

Stats & Stuff: Barton is an undrafted free agent signed out of the University of Miami in August 2004. With the path he has taken and the strides he has made, he has the potential to become a remarkable success story considering he went undrafted. The Indians are still scratching their heads how he went undrafted. He originally went to Loyola and then transferred to Miami, and the thought was because he had to sit out a year after the transfer to Miami along with the concern that he was not serious about baseball (he majored in aerospace engineering) it plummeted his draft stock and led to him not being selected in the draft. Since debuting in Lake County in 2005, Barton has caught the attention of the Indians and made a lot of teams second guess their decision to not draft him. Combined at Lake County and Kinston in 2005, Barton hit .326/.442/.506 with 7 HRs, 64 RBIs and 20 stolen bases. He followed that up with a breakout performance in 2006, hitting a combined .323/.412/.511 with 19 HRs, 83 RBIs and 41 stolen bases for Kinston and Akron last year.

The Good: In radio interviews over the summer, former Indians Farm Director John Farrell compared Barton’s build and ability to major leaguer Mike Cameron. Barton is the best Indians minor leaguer most people have never heard of, and his performance last year vaulted him past several players that the Indians actually took in the draft in 2004. In fact, the only one above him now is Lofgren. He is an extremely versatile player with a speed/power combination that teams dream about. Barton has the physical tools and the athleticism to make an impact, and has outstanding bat speed with power to all fields. His intelligence as a player goes without saying, as he is a heady player with a very good feel for the game. As a runner, he has very good speed and instincts on the bases and in the field. He also is an excellent defensive outfielder, and has no problem playing center-field or right-field. His range and arm strength both grade out as above average.

The Bad: Barton does have a tendency to strikeout a lot, as he whiffed 109 times last year in 446 at bats. Although, the strikeout-rate did drop significantly when he was called up to Akron as he only struckout 26 times in 151 at bats compared to 83 times in 295 at bats at Kinston. If Barton can develop more patience at the plate, it will go a long way at helping him provide even

more consistent production with his bat. Barton also needs to work on identifying breaking pitches better, and his swing tends to get long and he is very susceptible to inside pitches.

The Outlook: With Barton, Crowe, Snyder, Goleski, Francisco and Gutierrez all virtually on the major league doorstep or close to it, the Indians have a lot of outfield options to turn to in 2007 and beyond. Even though Barton is on the fast-track, he only has 151 Double-A at bats in his career. With the logjam of outfielders in the system, Barton should repeat at Akron to start 2007 because other players such as Ben Francisco and Franklin Gutierrez most likely will be in Buffalo to start the season. Barton will use the time early in Akron to accrue more Double-A at bats, and like Crowe, could be a mid-season callup to Buffalo depending on his health and performance.

3. Chuck Lofgren: Left-handed Pitcher

Age: 20 Height: 6'3" Weight: 205 Bats: Left Throws: Left

Stats & Stuff: Lofgren is as legit as it gets. He was projected to go much higher in the 2004 Draft, but fell due to signability concerns, and the Indians eventually selected him in the 4th round. The Indians feel they found a gem. After going 5-5 with a 2.81 ERA at Lake County in 2005, Lofgren cemented his standing as one of the Indians top prospects in 2006. Lofgren's 2006 season was sensational, as he went 17-5 with a 2.32 ERA, held opponents to a .217 BAA, and piled up 125 strikeouts in 139.2 IP. Lofgren set a Kinston modern-day franchise record for victories by a pitcher in a season with 17. The old record was 15, set by Brian Slocum in 2004. The 17 wins by Lofgren are the most since Kinston became affiliated with the Indians in 1987, and the most since Frank Bork won 19 games for Kinston in 1962. His 17 wins tied him with Sacramento's Jason Windsor for most wins in all of the minors. He was also named the Carolina League Pitcher of the Year.

The Good: Lofgren is a physical starting pitcher at 6'3" 220 pounds. As a 20-year old he has great composure on the mound, and has a good three-pitch mix lead by a 91-93 MPH fastball. He possesses the best swing-and-miss fastball statistic in the system and follows that up with a

hard curve. That swing-and-miss rate is heavily influenced by Lofgren's very good fastball command, velocity and deception in his delivery. There was talk during instructional league last year of him changing from a curveball to a slider, but he ended up sticking with the curveball and actually is now in the process of adding a hard slider to his pitch mix . *Baseball America* also recently tabbed him as the Carolina League's "Best Pitching Prospect".

Several comparisons have been made of Lofgren to a young Al Leiter as his stuff, presence and approach are nearly identical. Lofgren also has a knack for kicking it into a second gear on the mound when he has to pitch with runners in scoring position. Pressure just does not phase him, and he is just comfortable on the mound in any situation. The Indians have been most impressed with Lofgren's consistency from start to start, and feel this is a direct result of Lofgren's commitment to routine and being very mature for his age. He is a student of the game in that he understands and appreciates the history of the game. He also is grounded ego-wise where he understands he's in a special place, and that he is talented and is going to make the most of it.

The Bad: He came into the system with basically a fastball/curveball mix, and while his curveball was his out pitch in high school, at times he leaves it up and it isn't nearly as good as it was when he was an amateur. Lofgren sharpened it up during instructional league in the fall of 2005, and the results showed last year. Lofgren still needs some refinement with his delivery, and he needs to work on being more efficient with his pitches since his pitch counts get high by the middle innings of games. Also, he needs to work more on finishing off hitters. His changeup is the biggest key for him and he has worked on developing it. If he develops it look out.

The Outlook: Lofgren's aptitude is off the charts, which is why he could move through the Indians system quickly. Lofgren easily could have been promoted mid-season last year to Akron, but the Indians held him back so he could work on refining his delivery and learn to finish off hitters. In 2007, Lofgren will anchor the staff at Akron. Lofgren is on the fast-track to the major leagues, and could debut sometime in 2008 before he gets strong consideration for the starting rotation going into 2009.

2. Trevor Crowe: Outfielder

Age: 23 Height: 6'0" Weight: 190 Bats: Switch Throws: Right

Stats & Stuff: After taking him with the 1st pick in the 2005 draft out of the University of Arizona, Crowe has been as advertised. After a somewhat disappointing debut in 2005 when he hit .251/.322/.331 at Lake County, Crowe started off with a bang in 2006. At Kinston last year, Crowe hit .329/.449/.470 and had 29 stolen bases in 60 games before he was called up to Akron mid-season. At Akron, Crowe continued his torrid hitting. Crowe was sidelined a few weeks after being called up with an ankle injury, and it slowed him down offensively. The Indians also experimented with him at second-base, which was another reason he struggled last in the year. The position switch and injury hindered Crowe the last month of the season, and his final numbers at Akron dipped to .234/.318/.325. Overall in 2006, Crowe hit .286/.393/.405 with 5 HRs, 44 RBIs and 45 stolen bases in 101 games.

The Good: Crowe's bat and above average speed on the bases play right now in the majors, and he not only hits for average with some pop, but he has excellent plate discipline and pitch recognition skills. His patience at the plate and ability to work counts very well was shown with his 68 walks and only 71 strikeouts, and his approach makes him a potential leadoff or 2-hole hitter for the Indians down the road. *Baseball America* ranked him #1 in the Carolina League as the league's "Best Batting Prospect", the player with the "Best Strike Zone Judgment", and as the league's "Most Exciting Player".

Crowe has a very advanced bat, which will allow him to be moved quickly through the farm system. Defensively, Crowe grades out as an above average center-fielder with an above average arm. Crowe has a contagious swagger, and is a very high energy and explosive player who has an engine that never stops. The Indians feel he will hit for more power in the future, and prior to nixing the second-base move felt his best comp as a major leaguer was Brian Roberts of the Orioles. Even as an outfielder, Roberts is exactly the offensive player the Indians envision Crowe being.

The Bad: While he has good speed, he really doesn't have the quickness or range to play center-field in the big leagues which will push him to left-field. Crowe also has had trouble staying away from the injury bug in his two years as a pro. In 2005, he was hampered with a

few nagging injuries, and in 2006 he missed parts of the season on the disabled list for a strained oblique and ankle sprain. Also, the Indians this off-season decided to nix the second-base experiment for Crowe. The general feeling was that it would take at least two years for him to become adequate at the position defensively, and when weighing this with where he is at currently as an offensive player, they just did not want to slow down Crowe's progress.

The Outlook: Crowe will play center-field next year in the minors, but with Grady Sizemore firmly planted in center-field for the Indians, when Crowe does make the Indians roster it is likely he will play left-field. Crowe is ahead of the curve somewhat, and is on the fast track to the major leagues. While it looks like he will start 2007 in Buffalo, he actually may return to Akron to start the 2007 season before moving up to Buffalo mid-season. With Franklin Gutierrez and Ben Francisco likely to return to Buffalo, and the Indians likely to push Brad Snyder and maybe Ryan Goleski up to Buffalo first, Crowe presumably will remain in Akron the first month or so and play center-field full-time. With Crowe back in the outfield for good, depending on his performance and injuries/performance issues with players at the major league level, Crowe could figure into the outfield mix and be a mid-season call-up in 2007.

1. Adam Miller: Right-handed Pitcher

Age: 22 Height: 6'4" Weight: 175 Bats: Right Throws: Right

Stats & Stuff: Miller was drafted out of high school in the 1st round of the 2003 Draft. After a very lackluster 2005 season, in 2006 Miller reaffirmed his status as the Indians #1 prospect. Miller finished the 2005 season with a 2-4 record and 4.86 ERA in 15 starts at Mahoning Valley and Kinston, and struggled to regain his confidence all year after a strained elbow ligament shelved him for the first few months of the season. But, in 2006 Miller returned 100% healthy in mind and body, and ended the season with a 15-6 record and 2.75 ERA as well as tallying up 161 strikeouts in 158.1 IP. In addition, Miller's 15 wins set an Akron franchise record, passing Paul Byrd's 1992 franchise record of 14 wins in a season. His 161 strikeouts e also crushed the single-season team record of 149, which was set by Travis Driskill in 1996. Miller was named the Pitcher of the Year in the Eastern League, and won the Indians Bob Feller Award as the organization's top pitcher in the minors.

The Good: The confidence is flowing once again with this kid, and the difference has been his fastball command and the confidence in his secondary pitches (slider and changeup). Early on in 2006, Miller was on a strict 85 pitch count in order to keep him healthy and fresh, but the pitch count actually helped force Miller to learn how to be more efficient as a pitcher. According to the Indians, two things Miller did in 2006 showed that he is progressing rapidly as a pitcher: 1.) he used all three of his pitches effectively, and 2.) his maturity as a pitcher began to show as he depended more on location with those three pitches rather than just sheer velocity. In other words, Miller no longer is just firing the ball in there, he is pitching.

The Indians were also impressed with the aggressiveness Miller displayed in attacking every hitter. While his velocity is down a little, he still was able to consistently touch 96 MPH in the 7th inning. One can only wonder if this “attack” mentality and the adjustments he made in becoming a pitcher were a direct result of his meeting with Roger Clemens last spring. Clemens came to Winter Haven during the spring last year and sat down with Miller to personally talk about his routine and provided some invaluable insight on pitching. The sit down apparently worked, and it energized Miller.

While he started the season slow, the second half of the season he was dominating. In a stretch of seven starts from early July to early August, Miller was 6-0 with a ridiculous 0.40 ERA (2 ER in 45.2 IP), and only allowed 29 hits while piling up 52 strikeouts. Miller was unbelievable the final two months of the season as he posted a 0.29 ERA in July and a 1.59 ERA in August. The reason for Miller’s resurgence is the development of his changeup, which is making his 95-97 MPH fastball and hard-biting 87 MPH slider practically un-hittable.

The Bad: Not much. Miller did struggle early last season because of inconsistent location of his fastball and his secondary pitches still being a work in progress. Also, he was unable to harness his emotions and adrenaline on a consistent basis in order to allow better command of his fastball and secondary pitches when behind in the count. But, by the end of the season these problems were gone and Miller’s game jumped to another level. His changeup is still a work in progress, but his slider currently grades out as an above average major league pitch.

The Outlook: For the Indians ever to become a serious post-season threat, they will need to find a right-handed front of the rotation starter to pair with lefty ace CC Sabathia. The likelihood of that happening via free agency is pretty much a pipedream, so such a pitcher will have to come from the farm system. The 21-year old Texan fire-baller might be the guy, and he is on the major league doorstep. With the changes to Rule 5 Draft eligibility, Miller no longer needs to be put on the 40-man roster for the 2007 season. With this change, unless the Indians have a desperate need for a starter, Miller likely pitches most of 2007 at Buffalo and could be in line for a rotation spot in Cleveland to start the 2008 season. He could essentially slide in and replace Jake Westbrook if he is not re-signed (or traded), or even Paul Byrd if his team option is not picked up.