Akron right-handed reliever Randy Newsom is a rapidly ascending relief pitcher in the Indians farm system. He has gone from the obscurity of being an unknown and undrafted pitcher in the Red Sox organization fighting to hang onto a baseball dream, to now a legit relief pitching prospect in the Indians organization. Tony Lastoria had a chance to sit down and talk with him this past week.

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Newsom is from Cincinnati, OH, and attended Tufts University. He ended up going undrafted in the 2004 Draft, but quickly signed with the Boston Red Sox less than two weeks after the draft as an undrafted free agent.

His first year with the Red Sox, he pitched in the rookie-level Gulf Coast League (GCL) for the GCL Red Sox. He did well, going 2-2 with a 2.81 ERA in 18 games.

But, it was the chain of events after the 2004 season which have re-shaped his career. Near the end of Red Sox spring training in 2005, Newsom was messing around on the mound throwing submarine style, and Red Sox officials saw it and approached him about actually going with the approach.

What started as a joke may now end up being his ticket to the big leagues.

"I was just making fun of somebody. I mean, I meant nothing to the Red Sox, so they were kind of like 'oh, let's try this'," recalls Newsom.

"Credit to them, they liked me as a person so they gave me a lot more opportunities than they would have given some random undrafted free agent.

You know, I worked hard and I was there early, and I got to know the front office people."

Here is a video of him in action during spring training this year:

Video: Randy Newsom on the mound throwing sidearm

Newsom is a very likable guy, upbeat, funny and someone who doesn't take himself too seriously. Oddly, an incident with a fellow Latin teammate helped him stick around in extended spring training in 2005.

"I think one of the things that helped me stay in extended spring [in 2005] was that I talked to one of the Latin players who had a problem with the Bank of America, who tried to take advantage of the kid," says Newsom. "He was gone, and he was over-drafting every month because he had overdrawn. Well, he was gone for six months.

So they were going to charge him that and the interest.

So I went there and I used my broken Spanish to kind of explain what was going on and talked him through it.

And they actually came to me after that and they were like ‘we didn't know you could handle extended spring with all these Latin players'.

So I caught some breaks with that...I can't bash the Red Sox as they gave me an opportunity, but I can't say being traded wasn't good for me."

Newsom worked hard on the new pitching style the rest of the 2005 season, finishing the year going 1-1 with two saves and a 4.48 ERA in 18 combined appearances at three different Red Sox Single-A affiliates. But, he made huge strides in the following offseason going into the 2006 season.

"When I came back last spring [2006], the Red Sox were like ‘oh, okay, this is different...this is a different kid,'" recalls Newsom. I worked a lot, I worked everyday in the offseason. Even if I wasn't going to throw, I was getting off the mound or doing flat ground drills.

I was learning how to do it and actually I dropped my arm slot even more than what you see now.

So, by the middle of last year facing hitters I was confident that every time out the ball was going to sink and wasn't going to stay flat.

Some days it is going to sink more than others, but I knew that I could battle out there and I was confident in the fastball and changeup.
And I think toward the end of the year I became more confident in the slider."

In January of 2006, the Indians and Red Sox made a major trade headlined by third baseman Andy Marte and outfielder Coco Crisp. One of the covenants of that trade was the Indians

would also get a player to be named later, which was a list of players the Indians and Red Sox agreed upon whom the Indians wanted to do some more scouting on before making a decision.

The Indians were piqued by Newsom's unique arm slot, and ended up choosing him back in late July last year to complete the trade.

Newsom, always quick to joke about things commented on the trade saying, "Yeah, they [Red Sox] just gave me away. You know? I was the player to be named later. I am sure there were other players on the list, but I am sure when the Indians were like ‘we'll take Newsom' the Red Sox were like ‘Randy???

You want him???' (laughter).

No, but really, it was good as I really like the Indians."

While Newsom may joke about the trade, this is how he is as a person. As a guy who has battled tough odds as an undrafted free agent to get here, he knows how to make light of things.

As a player in his position you almost have to, as one of the realities of being an undrafted free agent is you are always one bad outing from being sent home.

"One of the things people don't realize is that when you get a million dollars there is something invested in you that the team is saying ‘we are giving you this chance' and they are not going to cut a guy even if he struggles," says Newsom. "If I struggle, I am going home. So I don't have any safety net. So it wasn't a question.

It was just could I pitch with my back against the wall every time out.

When I was struggling [in 2005], I knew that if I had a blowup outing that could be it.

So, a lot of times I was pitching not to lose at first and I think it got to the point where I had something like a six and a half ERA in the South Atlantic League and I said ‘you know what, if they are going to cut me they are going to cut me.

I am just going to throw the ball the way I can and attack hitters and pick the corners'.

And heck, you know what?

Groundballs started coming.

I got lucky I think."

He finished 2006 going 4-3 with two saves and a 3.24 ERA in 39 combined appearances (72.1 innings) in the Indians and Red Sox systems. Upon his arrival in the Indians organization,

Newsom made three appearances with Single-A Lake County before being moved up to advanced Single-A Kinston.

Newsome really seemed to gain momentum in the Indians system after his spectacular performance in the Carolina League Finals for Single-A Kinston last September. He was tabbed as the Mills Cup Finals MVP after he pitched 5.1 innings without allowing a run and yielded only one hit and one walk while striking out five in three appearances.

But, it went beyond the numbers for Newsom, as for the first time he felt the coaching staff and an organization had confidence in him.

"It's not so much that they gave me the award [Mills Cup Finals MVP], it is the situations that I pitched in and out of. The manager [Mike Sarbaugh] had so much confidence in me, and made me realize 'hey wait a second, this is a guy who thinks his career is going to be furthered by throwing me into this game.' For the first time a manager said 'you know what, Randy Newsome is going to help me.'

And that was cool, it was really nice.

For the first time I felt the front office was going to let him [the manager] do his thing, I was traded for, and my back is not against the wall every time out and I can go in and attack.

I don't have to worry about picking.

I think that has really helped, and this year I have another new manager in Bogey [Akron manager Tim Bogar] who is behind me telling me to go do your thing, throw the ball down the middle.

Bogey is just constantly reinforcing me."

Newsom started this season back in Kinston, and after 11 appearances out of the bullpen was 0-1 with a 1.50 ERA, and in 12 innings allowed 11 hits with one walk while striking out nine. His hot start earned a promotion to Akron, where upon arriving he was thrown into the closer role.

As of July 14th, Newsom is 3-0 with a 2.42 ERA at Akron, and was 13-for-13 in save opportunities before a couple botched save attempts heading into the All-Star break.

For some, pitching in the ninth inning is something pitchers have a hard time accepting, but for Newsom he likes the challenge.

"As a pitcher, you want to be out there for the last out. The game is tangibly won or lost in the 9th inning, so being in the 9th inning is great," says Newsom.

"Even if you are down or up you know the game is on the line and this is the last shot so you gotta go do it.

I've enjoyed it.

I don't mind it.

Some people don't like it, I love it."

Newsom knows his submarine style is his ticket to the big leagues. The key now for him is to become more consistent and show he can pitch in pressure situations.

"Yeah, there [are] lots of things I am working on, consistency being a key," says Newsom.

"I am struggling with lefties right now, so I am working on that, but the thing is, is I am getting better with getting a lot of groundballs [against lefties] but they are going through."

Probably surprising to many, and to even to me before I interviewed Randy, is he does not throw very hard. His fastball sits in the 81-83 MPH range, but as a submariner this is key as the lower velocity allows the ball to sink more. If you throw too hard, the ball is flatter and much more hittable.

"I throw a fastball, changeup, slider, and I have a four-seam fastball I don't throw much," says Newsom. "I'm at my best at 81-83 with the fastball. It usually means the ball is sinking more because it is taking longer to get to the plate.

If I am throwing 87-88 the ball usually is more straight.

It's just physics as it will be straighter since it is getting there quicker.

When it is sinking a lot down in the zone, it is a lot better."

Newsom knows that while a 95 MPH fastball would be a great weapon to have, you can be just as effective being a command-control guy. Especially when throwing from a unique arm slot.

"I'm not going to blow anybody away, but I have a lot of confidence in my offspeed pitches too, which helps," says Newsom.

He may not be blowing anyone away, but Randy Newsom certainly is blowing by other relief prospects in the Indians system and is someone for Indians fans to pay special attention to going forward.