Tony Lastoria has been absolutely relentless for us here at TCF this year, and is producing some of the best coverage of the Indians farm system that I've ever seen into print. At his recent stop in Akron to see an Aeros game, he got a chance to speak with outfielder Brian Barton after watching him take some swings in the cage before the game. Barton burst onto the scene last year as a big time prospect for the Tribe, and is likley close to a promotion to AAA Buffalo. His chat with Tony is inside.

At a recent game in Akron, I happened to be walking through the underground tunnel from the dugout past the clubhouse about an hour before the game. All of the players were huddled in the clubhouse getting ready for the game doing their normal pre-game routine.

Well, everyone except one.

When passing by the indoor batting cages on my way to the elevators to take me up to the press box, outfielder Brian Barton was in the cages all by himself hitting off a tee. This, of course, was not a surprise as Barton is often commended for being such a great young man and hardworker. He also happens to be extremely quiet.

I had the chance to pull Barton aside after his work in the batting cage and talk to him for a few minutes about how things are going at Akron. When asked about what he is working on at the plate, Barton responded, “More or less just trying to be as consistent as I can and have quality at bats. Also, go out there and play good defense every day and play hard. If I can keep the intensity up I feel that is what is most important.”

Barton was a mid-season callup to Akron last year, and in 42 games in Akron hit .351 with 6 HR, 26 RBI, 15 stolen bases and had a .919 OPS. He returned to Akron this year and through July 19th is hitting .306 with 8 HR, 51 RBI, 16 stolen bases, and has an .842 OPS. With this type of consistent production, one would have to think a long overdue promotion to Buffalo may be coming soon. While it

can be inviting to think about, this is a subject Barton tries to block out and avoid as much as he can.

"I hope so to get a call to Buffalo," says Barton. "But it is frustrating to think about it so you just try to let things play out. I don't know what is going on in the front office, so it is pretty much just keep doing what I am doing and hopefully in the process I can keep getting better. If I get the call I get the call, and if not I gotta keep doing what I gotta do."

Barton really shot up the system last year, where he went from an unknown undrafted free agent signing in 2004, to a top five prospect in the system entering 2007. He does it all, as he hits for average and power, he runs well, and is solid defensively. While he is not great at any one of these attributes, he is well rounded enough where he might be one of the biggest impact players in the system offensively because he can do so much.

"I'm just the type of person where I just want to make something happen," says Barton. "My knack is getting on base, period. My goal is to always get on base whether it is getting a base hit, getting hit by a pitch, walk or error, if I can get on base I can make things happen from there. I think that is what teams look for, a player to get on base and make things happen."

Barton certainly has done a good job of getting on base. While he doesn't walk a great amount, he does hit over .300 and he gets hit by pitches at a ridiculous rate. So much so, he has been seen on the leaderboard in the Eastern League throughout the year in hit by pitches, and at last count a few weeks back had been hit by a pitch 24 times. When asked why he gets hit so much by pitchers, Barton says it is a mystery to him as well.

"I don't know," said Barton. "I'm off the plate moreso than I was last year, so I guess maybe a lot of guys probably just have a lot of problems throwing in there (inside) consistently. Balls get away from them, and at the same time I don't know if a lot of them are on purpose. But, it gets me on base and lets me do my job."

It is possible the scouting report on Barton shows that you can tie him up inside, and the reason he is getting hit so much is because pitchers at the Double-A level still lack good control working inside which results in the high hit by pitch rate. Or, possibly, he could be getting hit on purpose.

"It might have something to do with a scouting report, but at the same time they don't want to make a mistake inside either," said Barton. "I guess they are trying to be too fine with it as no pitcher wants to make a mistake in. Sometimes it may get away from them, and sometimes it may be on purpose, but it is the way the game goes but it is one of those things that happens and allows me to get on base and make things happen on the basepaths."

Right now, Barton needs to continue to improve defensively and most importantly work on his plate discipline. His strikeout rate at Akron in 2006 was good in that he only struckout once every six at bats, but this year that ratio has dipped to once every four at bats. This is clearly his biggest weakness. Even so, Barton feels the strikeouts are something he will overcome and are not that big of a problem.

"It is kind of one of those things where it seems to be a problem," said Barton. "It is something I have been wanting to do to cut down on the strikeouts as you want to try and put the ball in play as much as possible. But on the contrary I feel like I am still making things happen and producing. I can't really worry about not striking out especially at this point. I feel like as I mature, those things will happen. That's something that comes with the game, where just as much as the person hitting home runs and getting base hits, strikeouts are going to come. Obviously I want to cut them down, but I can't worry about it too much because I don't want it to affect other things I am doing. If it happens to improve in time, then great, but I'm still hitting the ball well with the high strikeouts. So I feel like when they eventually do come down it will help my game, but right now I just say forget it and keep playing."

Here is a video of Barton in action:

Video 1: Brian Barton at the plate