In the third round of the 2005 MLB Draft, the Indians selected a young power hitter by the name of Nick Weglarz, whose size, strength, and Canadian heritage have evoked comparisons to 2006 AL MVP Justin Morneau. After being sidelined by a hand injury last season, Weglarz has burst onto the scene this year in Lake County. And our Tony Lastoria had a chance to sit down and talk with him this past week.

Lake County Captains outfielder Nick Weglarz has made quite a first impression this year as the 19-year left fielder has put up very good numbers at the plate, hitting .262 with 16 HR and 59 RBI in 366 at bats. But, while the raw power and production he has shown at a young age is eye-catching, it is his advanced plate discipline which has many in the Indians organization excited about him as he has drawn 69 walks and has a very good .385 on-base percentage.

But, things did not look so good for Weglarz a year ago. After being drafted in the third round of the 2005 Draft out of high school, in 2005 Weglarz played 41 games at rookie-level Burlington where he was the youngest player in the league and hit .231 with 2 HR and 13 RBI in 147 at bats. He went into the 2006 season as a highly rated prospect in the system, but his 2006 season was wiped out with a broken hand that saw him play one game and total two at bats for the rookie-level GCL Indians.

"I was hurt at the beginning of spring training (last year), and they couldn't figure out what was wrong," recalls Weglarz. "So they kept me down in Winter Haven, and in my first game in the GCL I just could not swing it anymore. That's when I got sent out and checked out."

What they found is that Weglarz had a broken hamate bone in his right hand. The injury sidelined him for the rest of the season, which in short-season leagues is only eight to ten weeks long, and he did not start swinging the bat again until the Instructional League in the fall.

While he is 100% recovered from his injury, it appeared that this year Weglarz would ease his way back into action and start with one of the short-season leagues at the GCL or Mahoning Valley. But, first year Farm Director Ross Atkins pushed a lot of youth to Lake County to start the year, with Weglarz being one of them. Weglarz essentially skipped rookie-level ball and moved right to full-season ball where you play a 140 game schedule, which for a young

player can be hard to adjust to the daily grind of a long five month season.

"It hasn't been that bad," says Weglarz. "Knock on wood, but my body has been holding up well. I thought I would get tired. You do get tired, but it is more of a mental grind than it is physical.

You just have to be prepared everyday to come out and work hard and get up for the game."

Weglarz is one of the best power prospects to come out of Canada in some time. His size (6'3" 215 pounds) combined with his raw power have often had him compared to fellow countryman Justin Morneau.

He has some flaws in his swing that need to be tinkered along the way, but his long arms and good bat speed generate tremendous power.

Still, there are improvements to be made as he moves up the minor league ladder.

"I have been trying to use the other side of the field, and hit balls the other way," notes Weglarz. "Just try to stay on balls and don't come off. Basically try not to do too much. Sometimes I have a tendency to pull off balls and roll them over and groundout.

But I think if I drive balls the other way, it means I am hitting them well and staying on pitches and then I can hit every pitch whether it be in or out with power."

One of the most impressive attributes Weglarz has shown early in his minor league career is a penchant for working counts and drawing walks. Weglarz is still a young, unpolished hitter who strikes out a lot (109 strikeouts to date), but anytime you are on pace to draw around 85-90 walks in a season in the minors at such a young age you have to take notice.

"Maybe one thing I have done well this year is wait for my pitch, and not swing at a lot of bad pitches," says Weglarz. "It is one thing I have really been working on. I think it is a combination of me being patient in the box waiting for my pitch,

"We are very excited to have a player like Weglarz in our system because of the combination of tools and abilities he has shown at such a young age," says Atkins. "One of Weglarz's strengths is his plate discipline and understanding of the strike zone.

He rarely chases pitches outside of the zone which is uncommon for a player his age.

Moreover, his combination of power and athleticism can easily project to the major league level."

(Here are two videos of Weglarz at the plate: Video 1 (1 min, 25 sec) and Video 2 (1 min, 9 sec))

One would think that being from Canada, Weglarz would be in for a little bit of a culture shock coming to the United States and having to live in the states for roughly half the year. But, Weglarz says it really is not that much different living in Canada and living in the United States.

"I'm from southern Ontario, five minutes from Buffalo, New York," says Weglarz. "I have been going to the states since I was 14.

I was 14 when I made my first trip down to Florida with the high school team.

I have been here gone all summer in the states since then."

So, having grown up so close to Buffalo, did he attend any Buffalo Bisons games as a kid?

"I've been to a few Bisons games," chuckles Weglarz. "Yes, it would be a lot of fun (to get there someday).

Playing at Lake County is great too, as it is only two and half hours from home.

But, if I ever got to Buffalo it would be Canada Night with all my friends and family there."

For a lot of high school and college players they grow up using aluminum bats, and one of the hardest things to adjust to initially as a professional is that transition from aluminum to wood bats. Not for Weglarz. He used wood bats all through high school, and with the junior national team he played with.

"In Little League I used them, but I never really used aluminum bats after that," recalls Weglarz. "All through high school, and since 14 when I started playing for Team Ontario we used wood all the way up. You get a feel for them. When I was 16 or 17, we went to an aluminum bat tournament and I did not like it.

I couldn't hit with an aluminum bat, it just felt different.

There is a little different balance, and I liked the feel of wood a lot better since I got used to playing with it all these years."

One of the things Weglarz is adjusting to is the transition from first base to the outfield. While he played first base all through high school and was drafted as a first baseman, he has never played the position since joining the Indians.

"I was drafted as a first baseman, but never played a day there in the minors as I went straight to the outfield," says Weglarz. "Last year was the first time I ever played outfield, and I played right field. This year is the first time playing left field.

It was a little tough at first because playing first base my whole life I am used to the right side of the field, and going to the left side of the field it is a little different and there is a different spin on the ball.

It takes a couple weeks to get used to and then you are fine."

Defense is certainly an area Weglarz needs some work on, and is a development opportunity the Indians will put a high priority on going forward.

"In order to prepare Nick for a potential career in the big leagues, we will continue to work on improving his defense to be major league caliber," says Atkins. "More

specifically, work to perfect his throwing mechanics, routes and angles to the ball in the outfield."

Of course, if things do not pan out in the outfield, he always has first base to fall back on. So, could Weglarz be one of those players down the road like a Jordan Brown who has some versatility to play both first base and outfield?

"You never lose playing first base, but I would rather stay in the outfield as am starting to like it out there," says Weglarz.

One thing is certain, the Indians and a lot of fans are starting to like him as well.