Brian Barton is one of the great stories of the Indians minor league system. Despite a prolific college career, Barton went undrafted because teams thought he was more serious about his aeronautical engineering degree than a pro baseball career. The Indians picked him up and have been reaping the benefits. Barton has power, speed ... and is now one of the Indians top prospects. He just got promoted to AAA Buffalo, and our Tony Lastoria had a chance to speak with him.

A couple weeks back, I had the chance to talk to Indians minor league outfielder Brian Barton while he was still at Akron.

Barton was having a very good season in Akron, and is one of the Indians top prospects in the system.

Back on August 5th, Barton was called up from Double-A Akron to Triple-A Buffalo, bringing him yet another step closer to the major leagues. As an undrafted free agent signing in August of 2004, the odds were long that Barton would ever make it to Single-A let along the big leagues.

But, the Indians are still scratching their heads how Barton went undrafted. He had originally gone to Loyola and then transferred to Miami, and the thought is because he had to sit out a year after the transfer 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.

Needless to say, the Indians are thankful for the way things worked out.

"Barton possesses a rare combination of speed on the bases with the power to hit the ball out of the ballpark," said Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins in a recent interview. "H

e is an extremely intelligent player and has great composure."

Yeah, intelligent is not the word. This guy is a *baseball player* and he majored in aerospace engineering? Surely he gets bombarded with rocket scientist jokes, right?

"Not really, but people always try to ask me exactly what my major was when they already know it so that they can hear it come out of my mouth," chuckled Barton. "It is a big deal, but it is not something I get too caught up in.

Just something I had an interest in while I was at school, so it is one of those things that I wanted to challenge myself with and I will continue to challenge myself in whatever I do."

Barton has now been in Buffalo for two weeks, which means getting adjusted to a new league and level. But, to him, the biggest adjustment so far has been adjusting to the better pitching.

"I guess what I noticed just from going level to level is [the pitchers] are not afraid to go after you in any count," said Barton. "But, at the same time, for a hitter it is kind of better that way because you expect to be challenged and you expect them to come right after you and it makes it that much more fun."

Prior to his callup to Buffalo, Barton hit .314 with 9 HR, 59 RBI, 20 stolen bases and had an .856 OPS in 106 games. He was also an Eastern League All-Star, and ranked in the league top ten in several categories before his callup. Last year at Akron, in just 42 games, Barton hit .351 with 6 HR, 26 RBI, 15 stolen bases and had a .919 OPS.

Barton was more than deserving of the callup to Buffalo, and he hopes Akron is now in his rearview mirror for good. He knows he deserves to be at Buffalo, and believes confidence in his abilities will help him whether things go well or not.

"It is just confidence. Just knowing that wherever I am at I belong here," said Barton. "Not getting too caught up in the results of things because it is one of those

things that have to fall in place. So if I keep my confidence up and expect to be here it will be alright."

So far, Barton has done well at Buffalo. In 11 games he is hitting .275 with 1 HR, 4 RBI, 1 stolen base and has a .746 OPS. Barton feels there is a lot more he can do to improve his performance and production, but he is pleased with the way he has played so far.

"I feel like I am holding my own," said Barton. "I am more patient at the plate, making things happen on the basepaths and just trying to keep the defense up.

There are some minor adjustments in getting used to the level, but at the same time I just try to keep consistent to what I have been doing for the past two years."

With Barton a step away from the big leagues, his versatility will probably be put to the test in the outfield. Barton is a natural center fielder, and has played a lot of right field this season, but he could very well move around and play all three outfield positions to add more value and versatility where he could break in with the Indians down the road as a fourth outfielder.

"I am pretty comfortable playing all the positions out there," said Barton. "I prefer right and center, but at the same time if left field is going to get me to the big leagues I am fine with it.

I'm in one of those situations that wherever they need me I just try to fill in."

Now at Triple-A, visions of fulfilling a dream to play in the major leagues are certainly racing through Barton's head. One of the advantages at Triple-A is so many players in the league have experienced life in the big leagues, which is something Barton has benefited from already.

"I just try to talk to them to see what they got from it," said Barton. "Even just from other guys from around the league who were up there, I just try to get a feel from them to kind of give me a little motivation and make me realize how close I am.

So, from that aspect it is pretty good to get that kind of feedback."

If Barton keeps playing like he has, it won't be long before he is the one giving feedback to a young promising prospect.