Indians first base prospect Matt Whitney's revival this season has been one of the greatest stories in the Indians farm system to follow this year. He was a high profile draft pick in 2002, broke two bones in his leg and several surgeries later his career looked to be on the outs going into this season. Whitney hit his 32nd bomb of the year last night and racked up is 111th RBI and is a runaway favorite to win the Lou Boudreau Award which goes to the Indians top minor league hitter. Tony had a chance to sit down with Matt during his visit last week and talk about everything he has been through. Yet another outstanding piece from our minor league guru.

Indians first base prospect Matt Whitney's revival this season has been one of the greatest stories in the Indians farm system to follow this year, if not THE story of the year in all of minor league baseball. Seemingly forgotten coming into this season after three rough years in Single-A, Whitney is healthy and is showing why he was once dubbed by some Indians officials as "the next Manny Ramirez" shortly after he was drafted in 2002.

Whitney was drafted out of high school by the Indians in the first round of the 2002 First Year Player Draft. He was a supplemental pick at the end of the first round, a pick the Indians obtained when Juan Gonzalez (Type-A free agent) was lost in free agency after the 2001 season. After signing with the Indians, Whitney put up an impressive power display at rookie-level Burlington that year as an 18-year old kid when he hit .286 with 10 HR and 33 RBI in 45 games.

Getting back to where Whitney is today did not happen purely by talent alone, as it took a lot of hard work, a lengthy rehab, extreme patience, incredible resilience, and a drive to come back. Many players would have given up long ago with the physical problems he dealt with the past four years, and the performance issues on top of it.

But, that is what makes Whitney special.

He is a fighter, a great young man, and most of all a gifted hitter.

"Well, sitting and not playing for a year and having to go through rehab was hard being out of it and stuff, and those thoughts (retirement) always pop up," said Whitney during an interview at Kinston last weekend. "But, I never really considered ever fully saying 'okay this is it for me'. I always thought 'okay I am going to get back and get back on the field and keep playing'.

I think that has helped me get back to where I am now."

Where Whitney is now is where a lot of people thought he would be when he was drafted back in 2002, which is a legit high profile power hitting corner infield bat. This year, in 126 combined games at Lake County and Kinston, Whitney is hitting .301 with 32 HR, 111 RBI and a .920 OPS. In all of minor league baseball, he ranks fourth in home runs and third in RBI.

Yes, Whitney seems to have once again established himself as the power hitting infield prospect the Indians drooled over back in 2002, he just took a long detour in getting there.

Whitney's career detour happened back in minor league camp during his first spring training in the spring of 2003. Whitney broke two bones in his leg in a freak accident while playing basketball at the Chain of Lakes spring training complex in Winter Haven, Florida.

Whitney stepped on a sprinkler head the wrong way, and in one snap of the bones in his left leg his once promising career was put in doubt.

"We were shooting around a little bit, and I slipped and ended up breaking both bones in my leg," recalled Whitney. "Then I went through a year and a half of rehab pretty much until I was able to get back on the field."

Whitney ended up having two different surgeries on his left leg (another one later), and his entire 2003 season was wiped out, one where he was supposed to be the starting third baseman in the inaugural season for the Lake County Captains in Eastlake, Ohio. Whitney eventually returned in 2004, where he started the year in Lake County playing mostly as a designated hitter as he was still not 100% recovered from the leg injury.

He basically played the 2004 season on one leg as his toes were pointed downward due to the scar tissue that accumulated there during that time, so he was basically running on top of his toes on that leg.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]