At 6'4" and 210 pounds with gold hair flying out from everywhere under his cap, Matt Meyer looks more like a surfer than a baseball player when you see him take the mound. But, one windup and pitch is all you need to see to believe that he has potential and is something special the Indians may have mined from the 2006 Draft. Tony believes the Indians have a diamond in the rough here, and had a chance to speak with Meyer this weekend.

Left-handed minor league pitcher Matt Meyer is one of those guys to take note of and file away.

While he has no real chance to pitch in Cleveland anytime this year, he is a fast rising left-handed relief specialist who could enter into the Indians' plans sometime in 2009 if he continues to impress this season.

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Matt Meyer
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Meyer was a 15th round selection out of Boston College by the Indians in the 2006 Draft. The Indians signed him quickly, and he impressed right out of the gates in his professional debut at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley in 2006 when he made 19 appearances out of the bullpen and went 2-2 with 2 saves and a 1.98 ERA.

He overmatched opposing hitters by holding them to a .230 average and struck out 31 batters in 27.1 innings pitched.

Last year, Meyer picked up right where he left off the previous year at Mahoning Valley and dominated hitters in Single-A Lake County where in 11 appearances he put up a 0.50 ERA, held opposing hitters to a .182 batting average, and struck out 20 batters in 18 innings pitched. How ever, Meyer struggled some when he was promoted to advanced Single-A Kinston a few months into the season.

He finished the year in Kinston going 3-4 with 3 saves and a 4.32 ERA, and held opposing hitters to a .258 batting average while striking out 58 in 50 innings pitched.

The numbers at Kinston last year were not that bad, but they were a clear step back from his earlier dominating numbers at Mahoning Valley and Lake County.

"Lake County I did well and threw a lot of strikes," said Meyer over the weekend in Woodbridge, Virginia. "And then when I got to Kinston I kind of got the mindset where I felt like I was going to be overmatched or I did not know what was going to happen."

Meyer's trouble with letting some doubt creep in when he was promoted to Kinston is not unusual. One bad outing or moving into the unknown as you move up the minor league ladder can create doubt for any player, and this happened with Meyer. He is only human. B ut, after initially struggling with the call up to Kinston and adjusting to life in the Carolina League, Meyer quickly realized it is still just baseball and that as long as you throw strikes, hit your spots, and stay confident in your abilities, everything else will take care of itself.

"I realized after [the callup] that a hitter is a hitter no matter where you play," said Meyer. "So I got into the mindset to just pound the zone and just let the guys get themselves out. I have had rocky patches here and there here in Kinston, but I feel like after I got settled in a little bit I have started to throw really well. Now, it is good to be back here and I know it is kind of a comfortable place."

Meyer throws a fastball that hovers around 88 to 92 MPH and gets up to 93 MPH at times, and he compliments it with a deceptive slider. Some may be surprised that the one pitch he has the most trust in is actually not his fastball, but his slider.

When he needs to reach back for a big pitch or throw a quality strike, the slider more times than not is what he relies on.

"My slider....I love it," said Meyer. "I will throw that in any count. Especially because [the Indians] project me as a left-on-left guy, so I will throw a 2-0 or 3-1 slider to anyone."

Meyer has had some trouble with right-handers, but is very tough on lefties and it is why many of the Indians top decision-makers project him as a lefty specialist down the road. Meyer has always been tough on left-handed hitters because of his unique arm slot where he drops down to below three-quarters.

He also has a funky hitch in his delivery just before he lets go of the ball where he whips his

hand through at what seems like the last second, so it is hard for opposing hitters to pick up the ball out of his hand.

Down the road, Meyer may even have some potential working from a submarine arm slot as this is something you rarely see from a left-hander and he seems to have the arm to handle it. Either way, Meyer understands that being a left-on-left specialist may be his ticket to the big leagues.

"I think that is what they are projecting me as, and that is fine with me," said Meyer.

In his short minor league career, Meyer has shown the ability to pile up strikeouts (10.29 K/9 career), but he also piles up the walks (4.91 BB/9 career). He needs to continue working on his fastball command, and tighten up his slider.

"Yeah, working on my fastball command is something they really want me to do," said Meyer. "I know I struggled my first outing down here (1 IP, 2 ER, 1 H, 3 BB, 1 K) and walked a lot of guys. It was because my fastball was not locating well. It is getting better, but is still not great.

If I can work off my fastball and throw both my fastball and slider for a strike and get hitters off balance and take goofy swings, that is the main goal."

Knowing you have to improve your fastball command is one thing, but going out and actually doing it is the true separator in a pitcher making it to the big leagues or forever toiling around in the minors. Meyer has seen first hand how tough and cruel the game of professional baseball can be as many of his closest friends in the organization were released in spring training a month ago. Seeing players in the organization here one minute and gone the next is the reality of the game, and those that are released are usually the ones who could not make expected improvements. With that in mind, Meyer knows what he has to do to improve his fastball command, and he intends to follow through on it and actively listen to instruction from the coaching staff.

"I'm just working on repeating my delivery," said Meyer. "I kind of spin off from the right side a little bit when I am pitching, and sometimes my arm slot can be inconsistent.

I just have to find that happy medium and not try to do too much and open up my front side.

My ball has tail on it, so just let it run over the plate.

Just throw strikes and pound the zone to get hitters out."

If Meyer can harness his fastball and continue to pitch well against left-handers, he could be a quick mover and get some time in Akron at some point this season.

"Next up is Akron and I would like to make it up there as quickly as possible, but I have to do well here first," said Meyer.

*Photo courtesy of Ken Carr*