The Lake County Captains pitching staff is loaded with many promising pitching prospects from the front of the rotation to the back of the bullpen. It has been the strength of the team and been the catalyst to their 15-7 fast start putting them in first place of the South Atlantic League's Northern Division. One of the key components to that hot start has been right-handed starter Chris Archer. And Tony had a chance to speak with him when he visited with the team last week.

The Lake County Captains pitching staff is loaded with many promising pitching prospects from the front of the rotation to the back of the bullpen. It has been the strength of the team and been the catalyst to their 15-7 fast start putting them in first place of the South Atlantic League's Northern Division.

One of the key components to that hot start has been right-handed starter Chris Archer. At age 19, Archer is the youngest player on the team, and is one of the youngest players in the league period.

So far, his youthfulness and inexperience has yet to be a roadblock for him.

In four starts this season for Single-A Lake County, Archer is 1-2 with a 2.60 ERA and in 17.1 innings has allowed only five hits but walked 18 while striking out 13.

Archer has a live arm with a fastball that consistently sits around 90-92, although according to Archer he has topped out as high as 95 MPH. He is still very young, so as Archer matures his velocity is expected to increase.

He compliments his fastball with a sharp slider that has good bite, and it sits around 80 MPH

and has the makings of being a plus pitch.

Some scouts felt his power breaking ball was the best of any high school pitcher in the draft.

He also throws a changeup that he is still working on refining.

At 6'3" and 180 pounds and still growing, Archer has a projectable body to handle the rigors of being a starting pitcher.

Archer's best pitch is his slider, although these days he has more confidence in his fastball. He is getting a lot of groundballs with the slider, but he is getting a lot more strikeouts than he used to with his fastball. His fastball does not sink, but he does a good job of getting his fastball on a downward plane and his command and location of the pitch continues to improve.

Archer was a 5th round pick in the 2006 Draft out of high school (NC). As a high school draft pick, Archer had the option of agreeing to terms with the Indians and getting a head start on his professional baseball career, or going on to college where he had already accepted to play baseball at the University of Miami, FL.

Archer choose to get his baseball career started right away with the long bus rides, bad food, and cramped living conditions as a minor leaguer, rather than the fun of college life as a student athlete.

"When I got drafted, I said I would rather develop in the minor leagues than in college because you never know what will happen," said Archer in an interview last weekend.

Archer's assignment to Lake County to start the season was sort of a surprise. Not only is he very young, but he had not been overly impressive his first two seasons in the system coming into this year. In 2006, Archer signed quickly after the draft and went right to work at rookie-level Burlington and the Gulf Coast League (GCL).

In eight combined appearances there, Archer went on to go 0-3 with a 7.71 ERA and in 21 innings allowed 17 hits, 17 walks, and struck out 21.

He followed that up last year by going back to the GCL and making one spot start in Lake County, and in 12 combined appearances was 1-7 with a 6.35 ERA and in 56.2 innings allowed 61 hits, 24 walks, and struck out 53.

So, with a career record of 1-10 with a 6.37 ERA in two minor league seasons and just turning 19, it was one of the bigger surprises to see Archer as part of the Lake County opening day roster this year. However, it is not always about the statistics, and the fact that Archer was placed on a full-season roster at his age shows how highly the Indians organization thinks of him and the confidence they have in his abilities. Archer's exceptional athleticism, attitude and confidence also likely played into the decision, and it is sort of a reward for how hard he has worked over the last two years.

"Right now I am 19 and most 19 year olds are freshmen in college," said Archer. "I graduated young at 17.

I was drafted in 2006, but really I am the same age as the 2007 Draft.

Most of those guys from the 2007 Draft are still in extended, and unless you are a top notch first round guy you are not going to go to A-ball right out of the draft at 19.

So, I am 19 now and in A-ball."

One of the things that has helped Archer in the early stages of his career is how quickly he has adapted to the professional game. In extended spring training last year, Archer took instruction well and while the changes the Indians made to his mechanics did not bear fruit immediately, it carried over to this spring where he had a great camp.

"Extended is tough mentally because you feel like you can play at the next level but really physically you are not ready," said Archer. "I have changed so much from when I was 17 and I thought I was ready when really I was not.

Extended is a good time to work on your mechanics because it is real relaxed so there is no pressure and you just do what you need to work on and get out of there.

If you go into it with a good attitude, you can get really good results out of it."

The results have shown so far with Archer's early season success. He has been effectively wild holding opposing hitters to a .091 batting average and has yet to allow a home run, but the 18 walks in 17.1 innings pitched (9.35 BB/9) is a concern.

"I really have been putting myself in some bad situations, but being able to pitch out of them is what has helped me a lot," said Archer. "I have always struggled a little bit with the walks. Just some mechanical flaws I have been working on.

I have just been getting better and better.

Sometimes I will be really good, but other times I will let the game speed up on me and get ahead of myself and forget what I am working on.

It is a work in progress."

Anytime a pitcher is walking more than a batter an inning they are going to get themselves into trouble. It is a recipe for disaster, and eventually it will catch up with them. The wildness is nothing new with Archer as going into the draft his command was a concern for teams, and it is

something that he will need to continue to work on.

Improving his command is the main focus for him at the moment, and Archer knows what he has to do.

At this point it is all about applying what he has been taught by the Indians the last few years.

"It is just little things like getting the ball out my glove quicker," said Archer about improving his command. "Mostly just focal point and not trying to overthrow the ball because when you overthrow it you are going to leave it way up. I also need to repeat the same delivery I use for my fastball.

Whenever I want to throw my breaking ball I need to start at the hitter and not the mitt. Just little things like that."

Archer loves baseball, and whether or not he succeeds it will not be for a lack of effort or hard work. He is committed to doing what he needs to do to improve and take that next step as a prospect to possibly reach the majors someday.

Photo courtesy of Ken Carr