If you love speed, you'll love watching Lake County Captain outfielder Adam White. White is the fastest player in the Indians system, and one of the fastest players in the minors. Coming into the draft last year, White was deemed the fastest runner in the draft and was graded as an 80 on the 20-80 scouting scale. In a nutshell, he is fast. Very fast. Tony recently visited Lake County, and had some time to sit down and talk with the Indians speedy young prospect.

If you love speed, you'll love watching Lake County Captain outfielder Adam White. White is the fastest player in the Indians system, and one of the fastest players in the minors.

Coming into the draft last year, White was deemed the fastest runner in the draft and was graded as an 80 on the 20-80 scouting scale.

In a nutshell, he is fast.

Very fast.

Players with speed can be very exciting to watch as they can be difference makers in so many ways. While a big slugger can change a game with one swing of his bat, a player like White can do it with his legs. Whether it calls for him to flag down a liner into the gap, going from first to third on a base hit, or stealing a base, players with speed can have just as much an affect on the game as a big masher at the plate. In some ways, they may have the greatest affect because when they get on base the pitcher tends to pay a little too much attention to them, which means a hitter is more likely to get a mistake to hit.

That is why they say speed kills. It puts incredible pressure on a pitcher and the defense, and it can also frustrate a hitter when they see would-be hits that may have fallen in instead get

gobbled up.

Even with the success he has had with his speed on the bases and in the outfield, White is still very raw and still learning how to effectively use his speed. It is one of the things the Indians are really working with him on right now, as minor league base-running coordinator Gary Thurman has already worked with White many times this year to work on tinkering things here and there to improve his jumps on the basepaths.

"I think my athleticism will take care of the defensive part," said White in an interview at Classic Park this week. "Even though there is still room for improvement there, my athleticism will take part in that. Base-stealing is another crucial part that I am learning more and more about.

I have to be smart about it."

As a base-stealer, it doesn't matter how fast you are, if you do not get good jumps you are not going to steal bases at a high rate and be very successful at it. Some of the best base-runners like a Grady Sizemore are so good on the bases not because they are blessed with blazing speed, but because they are intelligent on the basepaths, make good reads, and get good jumps. It makes an above average runner like Sizemore look elite, or an average runner like a Ben Francisco look above average. This is what Thurman is trying to hammer home to White.

The Indians are continuing to work on White's base-running in order to improve his fundamentals in areas such as getting quality secondary leads, reading pitchers better, and first step quickness to second base. Thurman has worked with White a lot on the mechanics of base-running rather than just relying on raw speed, and also in being a more aggressive runner.

"In spring training, Gary Thurman and I worked on getting a bigger lead," said White.

"When he came here to Lake County, I think I was picked off first base five times in three weeks or whatever, he said my lead was too big.

He said he had no problem with that, it was just that I was getting picked off, so we shortened it up a bit.

Having that consistent lead where I am comfortable where I can get back to first base but also

make it to second base every time.

That is one of the things he has really helped me with.

Also first step direction not taking a direct line to second base is also something I can get better at."

White attended the University of West Virginia to play baseball, and was eventually drafted by the Indians last year in the 9th round of the 2007 Draft. He debuted at short-season Single-A Mahoning valley, and in 57 games hit .260 with 1 HR, 10 RBI, and a .723 OPS and also showed his speed potential by swiping 22 bases.

Now at Lake County, the 5'10" 190-pound switch-hitter is hitting .248 with 3 HR, 15 RBI, 15 stolen bases and a .693 OPS.

White is quickly starting to turn some heads in the South Atlantic League (SAL), although if you don't look fast enough you might miss him.

When you look at White, his build and the way he plays looks a lot like former Indians outfielder Dave Roberts. Roberts has earned his dues as a scrappy, speedy outfielder, and anyone who saw the Yankees-Red Sox ALCS in 2004 know how much of a difference maker he was in that series. White possesses a lot of the same grittiness and speed Roberts shows, although White is probably a lot stronger and more filled out than Roberts.

The Indians have a station-to-station offense, and down the road they could very much use a player like White in the lineup or as a bench option.

"Someone told me that before that they saw Dave Roberts in me," said White. &quo t;With Grady there, he is going to be their centerfielder for awhile.

I realize that.

If my role two or three years from now is a guy who comes in as a defensive replacement in late innings or a guy they need to pinch run or get a stolen base that is perfectly fine with me.

It that is my role, I am going to do my best to prepare for it."

Things can always change, and you hate to pigeon-hole a guy this early in his career, but White most likely projects to break into the big leagues as a fourth outfielder. He certainly can be much more, and the fourth outfielder label is not a bad thing.

I mean, look at Ben Francisco.

That is a pretty good player who has been given that label over the years, and look how that has turned out for him so far.

For White to have a legit shot at the big leagues, he needs to improve his defense but more importantly show some versatility in the outfield.

His speed gives him the range to play anywhere, but the arm strength is the key.

White thinks he can handle any position.

"I have a strong arm I just don't really ever show it," said White. "Rarely in a game will I ever get the opportunity to let the ball go.

I never really get the chance to throw a guy out, I just try to be smart with my arm and hit the cutoff man.

I believe I have a strong enough arm to play right field.

It is not like a Matt Brown arm, I realize that."

In addition to the defense, the most important part of his game in determining his fate as a minor leaguer is going to be his hitting. This is the case with everyone, as if you don't hit or show the ability to project as even at least an average hitter you won't be around much longer.

You can be the next Lou Brock on the bases or Kirby Puckett in the outfield, but if you can't hit you won't stick.

This is something that White is continuing to work on, namely developing a consistent approach at the plate.

"My mechanics are a big part," said White. "They have gotten a lot better since spring training over the past month and a half.

Other than that it is my approach at the plate, and being consistent is the biggest thing right now.

Not swinging at pitches out of my zone and not trying to do too much.

When I go up there just to get my pitch and hit a ball hard that's when I do well, and when I get out of that is when I get into a rut."

Some may not know this, but White was a very good football player in high school. At Philipsburg-Osceola High School in Pennsylvania he was an All-State running back, but when he did not get a Division I football scholarship, White focused his efforts on his second love, baseball.

"I wanted to go play football first as it is my first love and just comes more natural," said White. "No big schools pursued me, they thought I was a little too small. And, I was going to play baseball, so it kind of backfired on me as I played baseball all summer.

I didn't go to any combine workouts that a lot of football players have to go to these days."

White plays the game a lot like a football player, but sometimes that does not always translate well to baseball. Baseball is a game where you can't force things and you often have to be extremely patient as you fail many more times than you succeed. Sometimes you can make something out of nothing with a play on the football field, but you can't do that on the baseball diamond.

Baseball is the ultimate test of discipline and mental fortitude.

"I am starting to try and slow it down," said White. "I try to do everything at a high pace at a football mentality.

Everything is stiff and hard all the time, and that is one of the things they are trying to work with me on to be more fluid and more natural.

The football thing helps with a lot of things in the game whether it is the endurance or athleticism part.

The mental part though I have to get out of that.

It is something that in football you can force things where in baseball you can't.

I could force and make things happen in football, but in baseball it is not so easy so that is one of the things I am trying to learn."

Growing up in central Pennsylvania, it is no mystery why White has such a big love for football. He grew up in Steeler Country, and like it or not Cleveland fans, White is a diehard Steelers fan.

To the core.

"Yeah, my two least favorite teams would be Baltimore and the Browns," said White.

"Just because of the AFC North rivalries.

But that is how it is for my family and for me, we just don't like those two teams.

But I'll never wear Steelers apparel around here, I'm smarter than that.

I know how it is in Pittsburgh when somebody sneaks in with Browns stuff on."

That certainly is a smart decision by White, and he is a quick learner. Just like he is on the bases.

Photo courtesy of Ken Carr