It has already been almost two months since baseball's 2008 First-Year Player Draft. A lot of draft picks have signed with their teams, while many more have elected to not sign and go back to school or pursue other alternatives. While it is still early, third baseman Jeremie Tice is one player that the Indians took in this year's draft who is showing early signs of being a very good prospect. Taken in the 6th round out of the College of Charleston (SC), Tice is off to a great start at Mahoning Valley, and T had a chance to speak with him this week.

Editor's Note: Minor Happenings will not post on Thursday as Tony is in transit to Florida. Minor Happenings will post first thing this Saturday morning with all the updates on the farm and what he is doing in Florida.

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While it is still early, third baseman Jeremie Tice is one player that the Indians took in this year's draft who is showing early signs of being a very good prospect. Taken in the 6th round out of the College of Charleston (SC), Tice is off to a good start at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley hitting .290 with 2 HR, 11 RBI, and an .830 OPS in 25 games.

"It has taken me a little while to get used to things," said Tice in a recent interview at Eastwood Field, the home of the Mahoning Valley Scrappers in Niles, Ohio. "I am pretty happy with how everything has gotten started.

Of course there is always room for improvement, but it hasn't been too bad of a start so far.

I am starting to get used to it a lot.

I like it and I love it.

I wouldn't want to be doing anything else, you know?"

Tice played two years at Tallahassee Community College before transferring to the College of Charleston last year. During Tice's short career at the College of Charleston he put up an impressive display of power hitting .393 with 25 HR, 83 RBI, and a 1.333 OPS this year.

Most notably, Tice destroyed right-handed pitching hitting .429 with a 1.406 OPS as compared to his .264 batting average and 1.063 OPS against left-handers.

He was named the 2008 Southern Conference Player of the Year, and was second in the nation in home runs.

"He drove the ball out of the park at the College of Charleston at a great clip," said Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins in a recent interview. "We can't believe he got to the sixth round and we are excited to have him.

He is very athletic where we know he can play third, and down the road he may catch as well."

First year Mahoning Valley Scrappers manager and former Indians fan-favorite Travis Fryman likes what he see out of his young third baseman so far.

"Jeremie has played very well," said Fryman. "There are definitely some things we are going to begin working with him on to smooth out his defense a little bit.

But offensively he looks better everyday.

He has been hitting the ball very hard and he is one of our leading hitters."

The home runs Tice hit this past season at college were not the result of some mid-sized guy cranking bombs with an aluminum bat. No, these were legit home runs coming from a legit power hitter. When a clubhouse attendant was asked where Tice could be found to conduct this interview, he pointed and said, "He is the guy in the locker at the end...the guy with the big guns."

Tice has always been a power hitter, and once he gets used to using wood bats he could become one of the top power hitters in the Indians system.

"Yes sir, I have always been a power hitter," said Tice. "I am trying to get used to the wood bats up here, as the balls that usually leave the yard don't and catch at the wall. It is kind of tough to swallow every now and then.

Hopefully I can just get used to the wood bats and the ball will start carrying like they used to."

One of the hardest transitions a player makes from the college to professional game is the change from aluminum to wood bats. Many college players who have aspirations of playing professional ball typically play in summer wood bat leagues, but Tice never played in one during college because he concentrated more on his studies and getting rest in the summer.

"No, I never played in a wood bat league," said Tice. "I always went to summer school to stay ahead in school and I also tried to rest in the summer.

When I was in high school I did play in a couple summer leagues and travel teams where we played in a couple tournaments with wood bats.

But that is really the only experience I had with them.

It is definitely a tough transition."

Not only can the adjustment to wood bats be difficult in the early stages of a minor league career, but adjusting to the speed of the game and the way the nuances of the game change somewhat from college to professional ball can also be challenging. No longer do players listen to the ping of the aluminum bat like they did in college, and instead they listen for the crack of the bat to help determine how hard a ball is hit.

"Yeah, it is a pretty big adjustment," said Tice. "The game speeds up a little bit on offense and you just [have to] get used to the bat.

On defense you have to get used to the sound of the wood bat.

You can really tell how hard a ball is hit with a metal bat and it is just reaction, but with wood it is really the same sound every time so you have to learn how to get setup.

I am blessed to have Fryman as my manager as he has helped me a lot during batting practice.

He really has not gotten into me too much yet because there is a 30-day period, but that 30-day period is over now [with the start of this homestand].

I will really get to pick his brain a lot more and he can help me out."

The 30-day period Tice is talking about is what the Indians call a "hands off" period for new signees from the current year's draft or undrafted free agent signings. Before making any changes to a player, they like to wait 30 days and just watch them perform.

They take notes of what they see and journal everything, and when it comes time to start making some adjustments with players they consult those notes when instruction begins.

The idea is not to bombard these players with changes right out of the gates.

Plus, it is still a feeling out process for the player and the organization, so it gives them all time to settle in and get to know one another before changes are mandated.

"They are really right at the stage where we begin to start working with them," said Fryman. "In our organization we have a 30 day observation policy. What that means is we are kind of hands off for 30 days.

We like to let them play and just get accustomed to being here and playing everyday.

We watch them and begin to journal what we see and begin to formulate the plans on things we want to work on.

We are just now beginning to start dealing with specific things that we want to work on with each guy."

Having a former All Star third baseman around as your manager never hurts, and that is what Tice has with his manager Travis Fryman. After 13 seasons in the big leagues, Fryman retired after the 2002 season with a career batting average of .274, 223 HR, 1022 RBI, and .965 fielding percentage. Fryman's best year as a pro arguably was 2000 with the Indians when he hit .321 with 22 HR and had 106 RBI.

He was also an All Star four times and won a Gold Glove at third base in 2000, so when Fryman talks you listen.

"Oh, absolutely," said Tice when asked if Fryman can have a big influence on his young career. "He has already told me some little stuff to do during batting practice that has helped me so much playing third base. Just minor stuff like footwork, how to setup, and my pre-pitch movement.

It has already helped me so much.

I am excited to get to pick his brain and get going in the right direction."

In addition to playing third base, Tice also has experience playing other positions. Given his size and muscular build, there is always the possibility that as he grows more in the coming years that he may need to be shifted to first base or to the left field.

"I have experience at other positions," said Tice. "I have played outfield and some first base as I have only been playing third base for three years.

I played shortstop and right field in high school.

I just like to hit, so anywhere they tell me to go I'll go.

I do like third base a lot, but I know there are a lot of guys there so where ever they can fit me in and I can hit I am fine with it."

Like all high school and college hopefuls who look to be selected on draft day, the experience this year was a memorable one for Tice. He has been drafted before as he was taken in the 38th round of the 2006 Draft by the Florida Marlines, but this year he expected to be drafted much earlier and he was ready to sign and get his professional career going.

He took in this year's draft with several of his teammates from the College of Charleston who were also on the draft board, and they all hung out together at one location doing things like playing video games to keep their minds off the draft.

Around the end of the 4th round to the beginning of the 5th round, Tice started getting some calls from teams that were interested in drafted him. One of them was the Indians.

"It was intense, it really was," said Tice. "You start getting phone calls from different teams, and then you finally get that phone call.

My [Indians] scout called me the round before and he said 'hey, if we take you right here will you sign for this?'

Of course you are just like "yeah, I want to play' and next thing you know he said 'alright, we are going to take you, look for your name'.

And then as soon as they said my name he called me back and said 'did you see it?' and I was like 'yeah'.

It was the happiest moment of my life, as I have been dreaming about that day for a long time.

Even though I have been drafted before it was never like 'alright it is a done deal, I am playing pro ball now'.

So it was very exciting."

After being drafted, some players and agents can drag negotiations out for a long time trying to get the last possible dollar. In Tice's case, he was ready to get his career going and get out and play. While he had leverage in that he had another year of college eligibly left, his negotiations with the Indians did not take long and he was signed quickly.

"It is kind of nerve-wracking when you get with your family and you go to sign the contract and you negotiate the amount of money you get for your school and money that goes wherever," said Tice. "It is a lot to deal with at that point in time as you never had to think about that before. With me, I never had to really think about

how much money is going to go in a certain spot.

At the end of the day, if I got what I wanted for school I just wanted to get in the system and I just wanted to play so I could make my way up and make my money down the road.

It was really not about the money for me."

Now that Tice has signed and is playing professionally as a baseball player, he is living his dream.

"I have always been on a baseball field," said Tice. "I have always been in sports as I have played football and baseball [since I was a kid].

I remember playing baseball all year round and in the fall I would play a baseball game in rec park and then change in the parking lot into my football gear to play in a football game.

I stopped playing football my junior year in high school to focus on baseball.

I just loved baseball and everything about it, and I just wanted to focus on it."

That focus has paid off, as Tice is now a prospect in the Indians system to watch in the coming years.

Photo courtesy of Ken Carr