We're getting down to the nitty gritty, as Tony's countdown of the Top 100 Prospects in the Cleveland Indians organization moves into the Top 40. Today's quintent of potentially future Indians consists of five pitchers, one of who will open the season in the starting rotation at the Tribe's new AAA affiliate in Columbus (Frank Herrmann), and another who could potentially start the season in the Columbus bullpen (Erik Stiller).

My *2009 Cleveland Indians Top 100 Prospects & More book* *is now available. Click on the hyperlink for all the details, and to order it just go to* *my website* *and click on the form to the top right to complete the order with a check or credit card. If you wish to send a check or money order by US Mail, please contact me at* *tlastoria@indiansprospectinsider.com* *and I will verify the order and provide my full mailing address for you so send payment.*

We continue today with #40-36 in the Indians Top 100 Prospect Countdown. Here are the earlier rankings:

100. Brian Juhl (C)
99. Brad Hinkle (RHP)
98. Mark Thompson (SS)
97. Adam Davis (C/INF)

96. Adam White (OF)
95. Jerad Head (INF/OF)
94. Brock Simpson (1B/OF)
93. Ryan Blair (OF)
92. Dustin Realini (INF/OF)
91. Shawn Nottingham (LHP)
90. Cirilo Cumberbatch (OF)
89. Michael McGuire (RHP)
88. Sung-Wei Tseng (RHP)
87. David Roberts (RHP)
86. Jason Smit (INF)
85. Marty Popham (RHP)
84. Jose Constanza (OF)
83. Adam Abraham (INF)
82. Isaias Velasquez (2INF)
81. Gary Campfield (RHP)
80. Heath Taylor (LHP)
79. Rich Rundles (LHP)
78. Dallas Cawiezell (RHP)
77. Robbie Alcombrack (C)
76. Carlos Moncrief (RHP)
75. Nate Recknagel (C/1B)
74. Karexon Sanchez (INF)
73. Roman Pena (OF)
72. Kyle Landis (RHP)
71. John Drennen (OF)
70. Todd Martin (1B)
69. Santo Frias (RHP)
68. Michael Finocchi (RHP)
67. Kevin Rucker (OF)

66. Matt Meyer (LHP)
65. Bo Greenwell (OF)
64. Paolo Espino (RHP)
63. Jonathan Holt (RHP)
62. Vinnie Pestano (RHP)
61. Kevin Dixon (RHP)
60. Randy Newsom (RHP)
59. Chris Nash (1B)
58. Carlton Smith (RHP)
57. Lucas Montero (OF)
56. Steven Wright (RHP)
55. Michael Aubrey (1B)
54. Delvi Cid (OF)
53. Clayton Cook (RHP)
52. T.J. McFarland (LHP)
51. Wyatt Toregas (C)
50. Chris Jones (LHP)
49. Chen-Chang Lee (RHP)
48. Matt Brown (OF)
47. Ryan Edell (LHP)
46. Neil Wagner (RHP)
45. Danny Salazar (RHP)
44. Jared Goedert (2B/3B)
43. Josh Judy (RHP)
42. Jeremie Tice (3B)
41. Joey Mahalic (RHP)

40. Erik Stiller - Right-handed Pitcher

Born: 07/10/1984 - Height: 6'5" - Weight: 210 - Bats: Right - Throws: Right

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2006	21	Burlington	R	2
	21	Mahoning Vy	A-	3
2007	22	Kinston	A+	3
2008	23	Kinston	A+	1
	23	Akron	AA	6
		Career		15

History: Stiller signed with the Indians as an undrafted free agent out of Princeton University shortly after the 2006 Draft. At Princeton, Stiller had a career record of 15-14 with a 3.60 ERA in 38 starts. He got a big break in that several of the Indians front office personnel are former Princeton student-athlete alumni, namely General Manager Mark Shapiro and Director of Baseball Operations Mike Chernoff. Chernoff and Stiller were former teammates on the Princeton baseball team, as Chernoff was a middle infielder and team captain his senior year in 2003 when Stiller was a freshman. He participated in the Arizona Fall League, going 0-1 with a 9.37 ERA and in 16.1 innings allowed 27 hits, 4 walks and had 16 strikeouts in 13 relief appearances. He also had a fantastic finish to the season last year where after a rough start getting acclimated to his callup to Double-A Akron in early May, from June 26th through the playoffs in 39 total innings had a 2.05 ERA, 10.4 K/9, 3.2 BB/9 and .193 BAA.

Strengths & Opportunities: Stiller is built rock solid after gaining 15 pounds of good weight last season and is working hard this offseason looking to add more bulk to his frame. His dedication in improving his overall physical strength has helped add velocity to his fastball, and he also made a few mechanical adjustments which has helped aide his fastball velocity. His fastball went from topping out at 91 MPH in 2006 to the 94 MPH it tops out to now. In addition to the fastball, Stiller also throws a cutter, curveball, and changeup. His best secondary pitch is

his changeup, but being in the bullpen and it being a feel pitch he rarely uses it. With his height at 6'5" it helps him get on top of hitters and his ball moving on a downward plane, and he is extremely intelligent.

Stiller has had a meteoric rise in the system considering he was an undrafted free agent signing just a little over two years ago. After finishing the 2006 season at short-season Mahoning Valley he opened the 2007 season in extended spring training and was eventually activated and rostered at advanced Single-A Kinston in late May of that year. Since then he has impressed and moved fast in the organization where in less than two years time he finished up in Double-A Akron. His initial callup to Akron this year was a big jump for him, and he struggled there early, but he eventually settled in and was one of Akron's most consistent relievers the second half of the season by pounding the zone as well as using and mixing his stuff a little better which allowed him to have success.

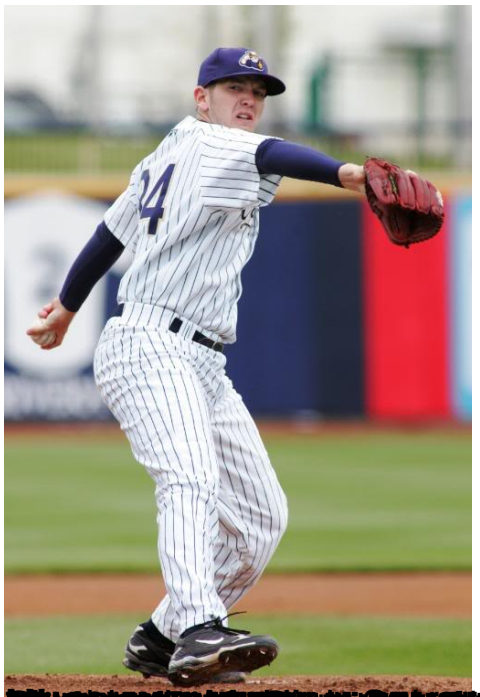
He can start or relieve, but at this point it looks like the Indians are pretty committed to developing him as a reliever. His over the top delivery can leave very little room for error with his release point and he does not get a lot of left and right movement on his fastball. His main priority for 2009 is to continue working on developing a consistent release point, being more aggressive with his fastball and commanding it down in the zone, and refining his changeup. He also needs to make sure he is throwing out front as he is pretty long.

Outlook: With his size and the way he goes about his business Stiller is quietly climbing the ladder and making people take notice of him, and has shown flashes of being a good middle relief prospect. Stiller's destination to start the 2009 season is uncertain because of the Indians bullpen depth at Triple-A Columbus. Given the logjam of relievers in the upper levels of the system, he probably will open the season in the Double-A Akron bullpen, but provided he is performing well and is healthy he should get significant time in Columbus at some point this season.

39. Ryan Morris - Left-handed Pitcher

Born: 01/10/1988 - Height: 6'3" - Weight: 175 - Bats: Left - Throws: Left

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2006	18	Burlington	R	0
	18	GCL Indians	R	1
2007	19	GCL Indians	R	3
	19	Lake County	A	0
2008	20	Lake County	A	9
		Career		13



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38. Mike Pontius - Right-handed Pitcher

Born: 10/26/1987 - Height: 6'2" - Weight: 235 - Bats: Right - Throws: Right

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2007	19	GCL Indians	R	0
	19	Lake County	A	0
2008	20	Lake County	A	1
	20	Kinston	A+	4
		Career		5

History: Pontius was a 43rd round pick by the Indians in the 2006 Draft out of Wentzville Holt High School (MO). Pontius signed in August of 2006 and did not make his professional debut until halfway through the 2007 season. Before signing with the Indians, he was set to go to college at Division-II Central Missouri State. He was a football player in high school who decided his senior year he wanted to commit to playing baseball and has made an unbelievable transition to professional baseball.

Strengths & Opportunities: Pontius is a strongly built kid and is armed with power stuff and a no fear mentality that projects him as a late-inning reliever - possibly a closer - down the road. He has plus-plus arm strength with a blazing plus-plus fastball that consistently clocks in at 94-96 MPH and tops out at 97 MPH. He has some natural cutting action and movement on his fastball even though he is not a three-quarter angle guy. His fastball is part of a three-pitch mix where he also throws a curveball and changeup. His knee-buckling projectable curveball is a plus-plus pitch with some good depth and bite to it. The curveball has a sharp 11-5 break and is a swing-and-miss out pitch at the major league level. The development of his straight changeup has been slow since he has used it sparingly and because he has spent a lot of time focusing on his fastball command. It is a pitch that is clearly still a work in progress, and one that has gotten a lot of attention in the offseason and will continue to get attention in spring training.

A big reason for Pontius' breakthrough last year is due to the hard work he put in last offseason by shedding about 35-40 pounds off his draft weight of 275 to a more slimmed down 240 pounds. He has the mental skills and tools for a major league setup role, and the football mentality plays into it. One scout compared him to a John Wetteland type where he might end up being a closer. His delivery is compact and he pitches at an over-the-top angle so he leverages down on hitters well and creates a good angle. He does a good job reading bats, and when he sees the hitter scuffling he goes right after that weakness. He is able to apply instruction well and is very coachable.

The Indians were very high on Pontius going into the season after his work in Instructional League in 2007, and he showed it early in the season last year at Single-A Lake County where through his first nine appearances he was 0-0 with a 0.00 ERA (21.1 IP, 0 R, 7 H, 6 BB, 29 K). His dominating start forced the Indians to prematurely push him up a level to advanced Single-A Kinston in early May where the competition in the Carolina League would offer him a better challenge, but upon arriving in Kinston the wheels fell off. He was over-excited and too amped up and struggled as a result. The loss of his command was his undoing (39 BB, 41.2 IP), and was eventually re-assigned to Lake County in the middle of August.

Pontius is only 20-years old, so the struggles he endured at Kinston are nothing to worry about at this point especially when you consider he was almost three years younger than the average player in the Carolina League. At his age and with his talent he is already a lot further along as a reliever than most players. The large increase in walks after his promotion to Kinston is a byproduct of the hitters being more disciplined in the Carolina League, but also the result of Pontius putting too much pressure on himself. Still, the Indians are continuing to work with him on consistently getting the ball in the zone and tightening up his breaking ball for strikes. He has had a hard time repeating his delivery, which has given him some issues with his fastball command. Also, when he loses his composure he tends to start overthrowing and has trouble duplicating his release point which leads to the walks. He worked a lot with Kinston pitching coach Greg Hibbard on controlling his effort level and emotions on the mound, and also former Lake County pitching coach Ruben Niebla has helped him with his mechanics to get him to throw the ball more down in the zone and downhill. Going forward, he just needs to pitch and pile up innings to continue working on his fastball command and cleaning up his delivery mechanics.

Outlook: Pontius came out of the gates strong last year at Lake County, but fizzled the last four months of the season upon getting a callup to Kinston. He brings a little bit of that football mentality to the field as he has the intensity, focus and drive the Indians are looking for in a player, and he may have the highest projection of any reliever in the Indians system and is one of the tops arms in the Indians minor league cupboard. If he can harness his fastball and control it and continue developing his curveball he has the potential to be a dominating backend reliever in the big leagues. He should open the 2009 season in the bullpen at advanced Single-A Kinston.

37. Ryan Miller - Left-handed Pitcher

Born: 12/14/1986 - Height: 6'0" - Weight: 195 - Bats: Left - Throws: Left

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2007	20	GCL Indians	R	4
	20	Mahoning Vy	A-	0
2008	21	Lake County	A	8
		Career		12

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36. Frank Herrmann - Right-handed Pitcher

Born: 05/30/1984 - Height: 6'4" - Weight: 220 - Bats: Left - Throws: Right

Year	Age	Team	Lvl	W
2006	22	Lake County	A	4
2007	23	Kinston	A+	11
2008	24	Kinston	A+	0
	24	Akron	AA	11
	24	Buffalo	AAA	0
		Career		26

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