Left-hander David Huff is a high profile draft pick selected by the Indians in the 1st round of the 2006 Draft who really broke onto the scene last year. After going 11-5 with a 2.52 ERA in 27 combined starts at Double-A Akron and Triple-A Buffalo in 2008, he solidified himself as a top starting pitching prospect in all of baseball ready to take the leap to the big leagues sometime this season. Tony had a chance to talk with Huff this week about a variety of topics.

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In the offseason, the Indians said there would be an open competition in spring training between Huff and fellow lefties Jeremy Sowers, Zach Jackson, Scott Lewis and Aaron Laffey for the fifth and final spot in the rotation. While he was in the mix to make the Indians rotation out of spring training, he was never really seriously considered for the rotation spot given that he was the only one out of the five pitchers who was not already on the 40-man roster.

Given that the Indians had other options to turn to with the four other lefties, there was no need to rush Huff and start his service clock.

Instead, the Indians decided that he could go to Triple-A Columbus and finish a few things off and potentially be a call up option later in the year when injuries or performance issues

ultimately create a need in the big league rotation.

Even still, it was Huff's first big league spring training experience, and the exposure to the big league side of things from the coaching staff, front office, players and atmosphere will help keep him more at ease the next time he joins the big league club.

"It was my first big league camp," said Huff in an interview at new Huntington Park in Columbus. "It was a great experience and I loved it. The guys are great up there, and they make it real comfortable for newcomers.

All in all I had fun with it.

I am looking to next year and hopefully I will be there again."

When spring training broke, the Indians departed for Texas to open their season while Huff and a cast of several other hot prospects caught a flight for Columbus in the hopes of getting that "call" soon from the big league club. The Indians told him to "be ready".

Coach Assitance

Since the start of the minor league season the Indians prized left-handed pitcher is off to a solid start to the 2009 season with a 3-0 record and 4.09 ERA in three starts for Columbus. While the numbers are solid, Huff is not pitching up to the standards that the Indians, fans, and he himself hold him up to.

"If you look at his numbers, I am sure they are not as good as he wants them to be," said Columbus Manager Torey Lovullo. "But he is 3-0, and he has kept us in the ballgames that he has pitched in. He has made big pitches when he has had to.

When his back is against the wall he has that one main ingredient that you can count on.

He is not gonna back down; he is going to execute his game plan."

The area of Huff's game he has struggled with the most in the early going has been his command, which is what is considered one of his best attributes. His ability to command three pitches and throw quality strikes is a big reason he is so effective and dominant, but his lack of the pinpoint command he usually has is what has hurt him in the early going.

As a result, he has allowed more walks and is giving up more home runs.

Coming into the season, Huff had a 2.25 BB/9 average and 0.7 HR/9 average, but in his first three starts this year he has allowed nine walks (3.68 BB/9) and four home runs (1.64 HR/9).

The command issues are partly the result of a setback he had in spring where he came down with tendonitis in his left elbow which sidelined him for a short time and resulted in him having to take it easy for a few weeks. As a result he fell a little behind and his mechanics got a little off track.

"For me personally," said Huff, "I maybe pressed a little bit [in spring training] because I was thinking ‘I am the new guy, I need to show everything, and I need to be perfect here'. That's probably a reason maybe why I cam down with the tendonitis. And that was the main thing when they sent me down, as they were like ‘we just want you to be healthy for the season, we don't want you to be nursing this injury for weeks or months.

We want you to get healthy and get after it in Triple-A'."

While the tendonitis has subsided and he is 100%, now it is just about getting his mechanics ironed out to get that sharp control back to form, something the Columbus coaching staff is working on with him daily.

"His fastball command has just been okay," said Lovullo. "We want to see him get ahead of hitters, we want to see him be aggressive on both sides of the plate with his fastball, and then work in that secondary stuff.

The secondary stuff has always been there.

He is always constantly tweaking and moving some things around, but we are looking for him to get into a little bit of a rhythm and finalizing his delivery."

No one knows Huff more in the entire system than Columbus Pitching Coach Scott Radinsky as he has worked with Huff every year since coming on as a pitching coach with the Indians in 2005. Radinsky worked with Huff most of last season at Buffalo, so he and Huff have experience working with one another and are commonly on the same page.

"We are just trying him to get him to stay under control and are not really changing anything," said Radinsky. "He has a tendency to fall off to third base. It is more him being conscious of it than reinventing anything.

I just want him to be consistent as a pitcher so he can go out and have success be it here or wherever."

Now that he has recovered from the bicep tendonitis, one small adjustment the Indians have made with Huff is getting him to shorten his stride during his delivery.

"I'm kind of varying it up," said Huff. "I am trying to get more usage out of my legs and core. Sometimes I stride too far where I need to shorten it up, and I am in kind of a transition where I am too short now where I am using too much of my arm and upper body.

I kind of need to lengthen it out just a little bit now to get the ample amount of power out of my legs.

My first pitch strike percentage right now is terrible.

It usually is at 75-80% but it has gone down to about 55-60%.

So I want to get that better too."

Fine-tuning his stride has had an affect on his control, which is a reason he has had some early issues with his command. A byproduct of the change in his stride is he has started to become a bit rotational, which means he is over-rotating his hips and falling to the third base side.

Huff is always cognizant of his mechanics and makes many adjustments in-game, and it is something he is working through.

"Yeah, I will notice things like the way I am finishing where I am finishing to third base and I will say to myself 'okay, I am finishing to third base, I am rotational, and I need to check myself'," said Huff. "There are three main things I am looking for when I am going through my delivery. If I am hitting those three things, then I am good, but if I am missing one I am missing them all.

It is kind of like a checklist."

When a pitcher gets rotational, his mechanics suffer. It is like a domino effect, because when the mechanics start to go south, the first two things to go are usually command and velocity.

"Yeah, when something is wrong with your mechanics, your velocity goes down, your location, and your pitches are inconsistent," said Huff. "You start noticing you are finishing high, you are releasing the ball early, and you are over-compensating to release the ball down and in, and that shouldn't happen.

Those are huge indicators that you see and realize you need to make adjustments."

Brotherly Advice

Huff comes from a family that is full of baseball enthusiasts. Baseball has been a huge part of the life of his family for almost a quarter century because of Dave and his older brother Tim playing since they were young children.

The relationship that Huff shares with his older brother Tim is unique. Tim serves in some ways as a personal pitching coach and motivator for Dave.

Tim watches every start, and being a former college pitcher and a student of the game who was taught well by the likes of Dave Snow (Long Beach State) and Mike Mayne (Orange Coast College), he offers insight that Dave considers invaluable.

Dave has always followed his brother Tim around like a shadow since his childhood days, and it is one of the big reasons for his high maturity level. Instead of playing with kids his age, when Dave was seven or eight he would hang out with all of Tim's friends even though most were

three to five years older than him. This propensity to hang around older people still lives on today, as you'll often see Dave hanging out with the older guys in the clubhouse.

Last year at Buffalo it was 36-year old John Halama, and now this year it is 39-year old Matt Herges.

Tim pays special attention to his younger brother's mechanics, and can often ride him pretty hard after an outing, but it is just some tough brotherly love.

"I am very different from Dave as he is more laid back and processes things differently than I do," said Tim Huff. "Where my mom and dad candy coats everything and if you need a hug you go to them, I am very blunt about things and very to the point.

That being said, while I am a little more volatile and say what I feel right away we usually give it a couple days if it is a bad outing.

I know when to pick and choose what things I say to him.

Obviously, the message needs to be positive in some way, so as much as I tell him he needs to work on this or that, there are things in the outing that are good.

I think that is what makes it work because he can go to my parents and get the hug, but if he wants real advice that is not candy-coated and 'oh Dave you are one of our top prospects', he comes to me."

Tim catches things to correct or focus on to help ensure Dave improves his chances of making it to the big leagues and sustaining success. Dave understands that while his brother may be very hard on him at times that he also welcomes it as he trusts his brother's advice and honestly.

"He just has keys, certain verbal things he says that just triggers something in my mind," said Dave about his brother Tim's involvement with his pitching. "Rad (Scott Radinsky) is great, he is awesome.

He is a left-handed pitcher, so it doesn't get any better than that.

As far as my brother goes, he has seen me my entire life.

He knows when I am going right, he knows when I am going bad, he knows when there is just a little thing that needs to be tweaked and he knows what it is."

Tim Huff played baseball all throughout college at Cypress Junior College, Chapman University and Long Beach State. Tim could have signed and continued his baseball career as a professional, but he instead wanted to focus on business and went back to school at Chapman for a master's degree in business. While he has never considered going into coaching, his expertise in pitching comes from his ability to soak in everything he has learned over the years from playing.

"It is good have video now of the games [in Triple-A]," continued Dave. "I end up finishing a game and I have ten texts on my phone saying ‘FINISH! FINISH! FINISH!'

It's great, he sees what I am doing and he knows what is going on.

He has that personal experience as he went through it and he knows what is going on so he kind of guides me a little bit."

Some may be wondering how the Indians feel about Tim's involvement with his brother Dave from a pitching aspect. In addition to Radinsky, the Indians have many coaches working with Dave throughout the year and helping coach him up and pointing out mechanical issues as well as other things. With the Indians saying one thing and Tim potentially saying another thing, there is potential that an inconsistent message is relayed to Dave from both parties. But according to both brothers, the Indians are aware of Tim's involvement with Dave, and at least to this point have not had a problem with it.

"He is talking to me everyday about mechanics and stuff to work on," said Dave. "Like when I go out for my bullpen, he says to have the catcher give me a lower target to help work on getting that good downward movement.

Most of the time it is to finish pitches, finish toward home plate, and stay on top of the ball."

Just last weekend Tim came into town for the opener in Columbus, but was not in town for

pleasure to catch the opener. He was there to work with Dave on the side and give some pointers after his sluggish start to the season.

"His first outing was erratic," said Tim. "It wasn't really him throwing, and I knew that. The ball was belt high. There was no movement.

He wasn't finishing.

He wasn't hitting his balance point.

He was rotational.

All the things we talked about not doing, he did.

[And the home runs], that is something he was working on last year with staying in the moment from pitch to pitch instead of relaxing.

What happens when you relax is you go into cruise control and there comes the belt high fastball and it gets taken out of the ballpark.

I didn't talk to him for like 24 hours after that game, and usually we talk like six to seven times a day with texts and phone calls.

He called me and asked what was going on, and I didn't want to say anything because I was fuming.

I was not satisfied with the outing, and I know he wasn't either."

When it is all said and done, Tim is not the drill sergeant he may come off as being. He's just looking out for the best interests of his brother.

"The thing about his goals and what I try to get him to understand is it doesn't matter if he is at rookie league ball or the big league team, the goals are still the same," said Tim. "You still stay with your same path.

A lot of times we don't talk about baseball because I know that is what he eats, breaths, and sleeps.

I talk to him about his goals and stay positive and keep his head right since if things go in a bad

direction it can just start snowballing.

A lot of it is positive reinforcement with strengthening the mind because his body will do what he wants it to do.

It is about staying in the moment and understanding what it going on around him."

At some point this season, Dave will more than likely get that call to the big leagues he has waited his whole life for. When that does happen, just like they were there for his first games as a child, his brother and parents will be right there with him when he makes his major league debut.

"I will immediately call them," said Dave about a potential call up to Cleveland this year. "They said they are not missing anything and will drop whatever they are doing and come out."

Tim will be there as well rooting his brother on, but likely even tougher with the brotherly advice.