In Indians lore, many fans will recall a 21 year-old Manny Ramirez belting a pair of homers in his first visit to Yankee Stadium back in 1993- an irrelevant September ballgame that transformed into a sneak preview of great glories to come for a future hall of famer and his rapidly improving team (forget the fact that Jim Abbott no-hit the Tribe the very next day). When Andrew Clayman thinks of the '93 season, however, it's a different breakout performance that springs to mind-- one by a slightly less heralded Tribe rookie. He tells that story in his latest "Ghosts Of Prospects Past" here at TCF.

When a highly publicized prospect blossoms and reaches his full potential, fans and sportswriters will often try to pinpoint the exact moment when he turned the corner and "got it," as the expression goes. It may have been a character building defeat, a gutsy comeback performance, or one otherwise unimportant game in which everything simply fell into place.

In Indians lore, many fans will recall a 21 year-old Manny Ramirez belting a pair of homers in his first visit to Yankee Stadium back in 1993- an irrelevant September ballgame that transformed into a sneak preview of great glories to come for a future hall of famer and his rapidly improving team (forget the fact that Jim Abbott no-hit the Tribe the very next day). When I think of the '93 season, however, it's a different breakout performance that springs to mind-- one by a slightly less heralded Tribe rookie.

On July 17, in a game that lasted just a hair over two hours, a 26 year-old southpaw named Jeff Mutis mesmerized the California Angels on his way to a complete-game shutout victory-only the second win of his young career. In many

ways, his performance was more impressive and even more encouraging than Manny's, but with hindsight, it also proves an important point- sometimes turning the corner can lead you right into a wall.

On the day of the ballgame in question, my family and I had decided to go to one of the Cuyahoga Valley Metro Parks for a leisurely hike in the woods. It was a ridiculously pleasant Saturday afternoon; blue skies and 80 degrees, the lazy summer day cliché. Throughout the course of our afternoon excursion, I had my radio walkman on, listening to Tom Hamilton and Herb Score call the Indians game in its lickity split entirety. Cleveland had a record of 41-49 at the time, seating them sixth in the AL East, but it was clear that the young roster was starting to come into its own. The core of Lofton, Baerga, and Belle was in place, and a few young arms were getting their shot to earn their keep. Maybe that's why this particular game would wind up sticking in my mind over the years, as the team reached far greater heights. This was a touchstone game, and every detail just remained crisp in the old recesses. Somehow, I even remember Hamilton and Score jabbering on about how J.T. Snow's dad played pro football. It's that vivid.

In 1993, Jeff Mutis was still one of the Indians' more promising young arms. He was a first round draft pick in 1988, and he'd proven dominant at times during his climb up the ranks. In 1991, he went 11-5 at Canton-Akron with a snazzy 1.80 ERA, earning him a September call-up. At that point, he was considered among the top prizes in the farm system. His stock dropped the following season at AAA Colorado Springs, however, where he went 9-9 with a 5.09 ERA. But Mutis bounced back in 1993, going 6-0 with a 2.61 ERA in 11 AAA starts before getting recalled to Cleveland. At the time, he was part of an open casting call for reliable starting pitching on a team with an injured ace (Charles Nagy) and a collection of question marks. This was, after all, the legendary season of Bob Milacki, Dave Mlicki, and Mike Bielecki. No joke.

Mutis would end up starting 13 games for Cleveland in 1993, fourth most on the team behind Mark Clark (15), Tommy Kramer (16), and the club's most reliable starter, Jose Mesa (33). Coming into the July 17 game at home against the Angels, Mutis was just 1-2 with a 5.93 ERA. This wasn't going to cut it if he wanted to fend off the Indians' other highly touted pitching prospects, including Julian Tavarez, Jason Grimsley, and Sunday's starter Albie Lopez. It was time to step up.

Maybe it was the weather, or the help of the free-swinging Angels. Whatever the

reason, Mutis finally became the crafty lefty the Tribe had been waiting to see. Across nine innings, he allowed just 4 hits and 2 walks, striking out a pair and inducing 15 groundball outs. He recorded his 27 outs in 105 pitches, and got J.T. Snow-Jack's son-to ground into two double-plays. Meanwhile, Wayne Kirby's two-run homer helped the Tribe nab an easy 3-0 win for the Cleveland Stadium crowd.

The next day, 21 year-old fire-baller Albie Lopez shut down the Halos for 7 innings in an impressive 2-1 Indians win over Mark Langston. For one weekend, it looked like the answers to the Tribe's pitching problems might be right under their noses (rather than in the form of soon-to-be-signed relics Dennis Martinez and Orel Hershiser).

For Mutis, though, that precision performance on a lovely summer's day would prove to be as much a curtain call as a coming out party. He never found that form for the rest of the '93 campaign, sputtering from one mediocre outing to the next. On September 5, two days after Manny Ramirez's two-homer game and one day after Abbott's no-hitter, the Yankees crushed Mutis for 6 runs in just 1 1/3 innings. It would be his last start ever in an Indians uniform, and the last of his Major League career.

Mutis finished the year 3-6 with a 5.78 ERA. At season's end, the Indians placed him on waivers, and he was eventually claimed by the expansion Florida Marlins. In 1994, Mutis appeared in 35 games for the Fish, all out of the bullpen, and mainly as a match-up lefty. He finished the season 1-0 with a 5.40 ERA. The next two seasons were spent entirely in AAA, first with Charlotte (Marlins) and then Louisville (Cardinals). He never got another call-up, and by 1997, Jeff Mutis had faded into obscurity-- a footnote to a footnote, but remembered nonetheless.