Things this season did not start out as Low-A Lake County left-handed starting pitcher Chris Jones thought they would. But as they always say, it's not how you start it is how you finish. After a disappointing beginning to the season for Jones, things have really come around for the young lefty, who is now a member of the starting rotation for the Captains. Tony had a chance to sit down with him in a recent visit to Eastlake to see the Captains play.

Things this season did not start out as Low-A Lake County left-handed starting pitcher Chris Jones thought they would. But as they always say, it's not how you start it is how you finish.

Jones, 20, was caught in a spring training minor league camp battle that had roughly eight to nine different starters battling for just five spots in the opening day Lake County rotation. He along with a few others were quite disappointed when they learned near the end of camp that they would not head east and open the year in Lake County, and instead would remain in hot Arizona participating in the tediously long extended spring training workouts.

To Jones' credit, while the initial sting of not making the Lake County roster took a few days to recover from, he quickly regrouped, focused on what he needed to do, and soon found himself on that flight to Ohio and on the Lake County roster about two months later than he initially expected when he was called up on June 1st.

"I was excited coming into the season since I thought I was going to start up here," said Jones. "At first I was real bummed, but after a week or two I got it in my head that if I just concentrate on what I was doing in Arizona I would be up here [in Lake County] at some point."

Jones definitely deserved to be in Lake County to start the season, but with the Indians waist deep with good young pitching at the Single-A level and below it was simply a numbers game where there were too many guys and not enough spots to put them all. He used that extra bit of development time in extended spring training to his advantage by working out with the pitching coaches to refine his delivery and made other improvements.

"I improved a lot of stuff at extended, and I got a lot out of it," recalled Jones. " I worked on my windup everyday over and over and over again.

It led from one thing to another.

I got my windup straightened out and am not stepping across my body anymore or anything.

I started throwing more strikes, keeping the ball low, and it just improved from there and kept getting better and better from there.

It's been pretty good so far."

Lake County Pitching Coach Tony Arnold has worked exclusively with Jones for the past seven weeks since he was called up. So far, he likes what he has soon from his young lefty.

"The one thing he has got is he is a left-hander with a more unconventional delivery, which allows him to have some deception to the plate," said Arnold. "When he has come in and commanded his stuff down in the zone, he has thrown the ball really well.

I really think he has only had one or two outings where he has not kept us in a ballgame and given us a chance to win since.

You can see some maturity in him as the season has progressed.

He has done really well."

The Indians plan to continue to develop Jones as a starter, which is fine with him since he prefers the role. He really has no experience pitching out of the bullpen except for the rare cases in high school where they needed him in relief during a regional game or something along those lines. One of the keys though to becoming better as a starter is developing more consistency on the mound, and that usually starts by getting used to a normal five day routine and how to prepare for each start.

"I love starting," said Jones. "I guess I like the before the game kind of thing where I know I am going to start and pitch so I have time to get my mind right for it.

A lot of pitchers do it, but I have these things I do now every time before my start.

I never had a routine until I got here.

It was hard for me to get into one even my first two years and I had to just kind of watch other people and see what they did and kind of mix those all together and make one I like.

It is actually starting to all come together.

I don't think I realized how much I did not know about pitching as I have learned so much in my two years here."

In seven appearances so far for the Captains, the 6'2" 190-pound Jones is 3-2 with a 4.75 ERA and in 30.1 innings has allowed 35 hits, 12 walks and has 23 strikeouts. His overall performance to date has been a bit sub par from a numbers standpoint, but he is still young and adjusting. In fact, he is adjusting to pitching in front of fans.

Prior to his June 1st arrival - aside from a small cup of coffee at the end of the 2007 in Lake County - Jones had spent the first two years of his professional career in pitching environments without any fans around.

10 o'clock games in Winter Haven and Goodyear that felt more like glorified scrimmages than professional baseball games.

"It is a breath of fresh air, and now I get the jitters I like before a game," said Jones about finally pitching in front of a crowd. "Out in Arizona it was like you had to almost imagine being here and imagine people watching you, so yeah, it was hard."

His biggest adjustment has been improved fastball command, though he still has a ways to go. His curveball is clearly the best offering in his three pitch arsenal, so he has focused much more on throwing a fastball-changeup mix with a curveball mixed in there every now and then.

In order to remain a starter he needs to develop and be able to throw at least three average pitches.

The curveball is already a plus pitch, but the key will be the development of the changeup and the improved command of his fastball.

"[My fastball command] has gotten a lot better," said Jones. "My changeup also [continues to get] better.

In [one of my recent] outings I only used two or three curveballs, which when I signed that was my best pitch.

I am figuring out how to use my other stuff too and when I really need my curveball I can throw it and it is still good.

But I like that I can use my other pitches too."

Another thing that has improved is the consistency in the velocity of his fastball, which is something that was expected to happen as he matures.

"My fastball is more consistently sitting at 90-92 MPH where I used to be at 87-88 MPH and touching 90-91 MPH," said Jones. "So I am sitting at that 90-91 MPH now. I gained a lot of weight this offseason as I lived in Arizona all offseason and worked out with all of our trainers [at the new complex].

I was 165 pounds when I signed but I am 193 pounds now so that has helped."

Arnold feels that Jones has all the tools and the repertoire to be an effective starter.

"He has the pitches that he needs to attack hitters," said Arnold. "He has a good breaking ball, he has a good changeup, and he has a pretty good fastball, it is just a matter of him being able to control his delivery to all him to consistently command the ball down

in the zone."

Jones was drafted by the Indians in the 15th round of the 2007 Draft. As a high school kid coming out of Tampa, FL and with a commitment to play for Indiana University, he had to weigh the prospects of signing out of high school and getting a head start on his professional career, or going to school and getting an education and hopefully improving his draft stock.

He was always dead set on playing professional ball, but his mother Amy kept him grounded and made sure to look out for his best interests in that he signed for the right amount and still had the college education to fall back on if the baseball career did not pan out.

"It was pretty much a money thing," said Jones about the decision to sign or not. "Obviously I wanted to play pro ball because it was my dream.

On the other hand I had my mom saying that it had to be the right money and that she really wanted me to go to school.

She understood what I wanted to do and what was best for me.

When my mom heard that the paid voucher [to any four-year school] was being added into my signing bonus, she gave up right there and was like 'ok, go have fun'."

These days, Jones is certainly having a lot of fun living out his dream playing professional baseball.