They often say bad things come in threes. That was the case for High-A left-handed starting pitching Ryan Morris as he went through a season this year that had a lot of strange injuries and incidents before recently being shut down for the year because of a shoulder injury. The Indians 4th round pick from 2006 is now back on the road to recovery, and Tony had a chance to chat with him this past week.

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A 4th round pick by the Indians in the 2006 Draft out of high school, Morris had been progressing nicely through the system and made it to advanced Single-A this season at age 21. He was coming off a solid campaign at Low-A Lake County in 2008 where he was 9-7 with a 3.76 ERA in 27 starts (134.0 IP, 116 H, 57 BB, 101 K).

But ever since the season started this year at Kinston, things were never right and never seemed to go his way. His first half performance was not very good as he was 3-7 with a 5.60 ERA in 13 starts. Once his performance had started to dramatically trend very positively, he sustained several different injuries within weeks of each other which put an abrupt end to his season.

The big injury was to his shoulder, an injury that came about in his last start,

ironically his best start of the season and arguably in his professional career. On July 5th he went seven very strong shutout innings allowing just three hits, two walks, and had seven strikeouts. It was a start that had piggybacked other recent very good outings, and it looked like he was back on track.

However, while he was throwing a gem that game, he was also hurting.

"I went seven innings that game, but about half way through in the fourth inning I started to feel a little bit of tightness and then as I started throwing more and more it began to get sharper," recalled Morris in a recent interview. "I just kept throwing through it and after the game I talked to our trainer Chad Wolfe and I just told him 'look my arm is hurting pretty good'."

Wolfe was not able to pinpoint what the problem was, so he shut Morris down for a couple days. But when he started to throw again after the short shutdown the sharp pain immediately returned.

"That scared me a little bit," said Morris about the return of the pain in his shoulder. "So we went through some rehab for a couple weeks and they again shut me down from throwing doing a bunch of strengthening exercises. Everything felt good and the shoulder felt good and I did not have any problem with the exercises. So then we tried to come back and throw and as soon as I threw a ball I felt the sharp pain again."

With the pain still lingering after two shutdowns, the Indians got their rehabilitation coordinator James Quinlan involved. Quinlan setup an MRI in Cleveland to have the shoulder checked out, so Morris went up to Cleveland in late July for the test.

"I got good news, well I mean not great news as I [found out I] will be out for awhile longer," said Morris. "But the good news was there was no tear in or serious injury, just some tightness in the back of my shoulder. The front of my shoulder was having to work a little too hard because of [the injury] and it was causing some discomfort and pain in there."

It certainly could have been a lot worse, and Morris was noticeably relieved when talking about the injury. For now he has been shutdown for about six weeks dating back to late July to get the inflammation in his shoulder to go down. He has since returned to Arizona at the Indians new player development complex to continue rehabbing his shoulder with the goal to be back at 100% by the start of

Instructional League in mid-September.

"The doctor said everything looked good, the shoulder looked healthy, and I just was going to need some rest and recovery and I will be good to go by Instructional League," said Morris. "They are just going to take their time with it and make sure everything is right. Over the next six weeks it is just going to be about getting the flexibility [in the shoulder] as during the season you can't really get the flexibility back as it is about maintaining the flexibility."

The shoulder injury may be the most concerning and also had the biggest impact on his season, but he was also part of a rare incident back in late June when a foul ball went through the protective netting behind the plate and blasted him in the ribs. His souvenir from the encounter with the foul ball was a huge bruise to the ribs, but he was still able to make his next start.

"I was sitting behind the plate doing the pitching charts, and I had the laptop to my left a little bit so my right rib cage was facing the net," recalled Morris. "The guy who was throwing was throwing 95-97 MPH and he threw a 96 MPH fastball and the batter fouled it straight back and it went straight through a hole in the net and hit me right in the ribs and just bruised them up pretty good. I thought they were broken at first, but I got an x-ray and luckily there was nothing broken. I had to pitch a day or two after that, but I was good to pitch."

If the shoulder injury and scary foul ball incident were not enough, a clear sign that his season was just not meant to be may have been when he suffered another strange injury before a recent game.

"I had another crazy injury too this year as when I was out for BP in Winston-Salem one of the grounds crew guys asked me to pull one of the screens

down and the thing fell on top of my finger and crushed it," said Morris, almost half laughing at the crazy experience he has had this season with injuries. "That could have been a lot worse too I guess. It seems like everything has happened off the field this year. It's been an extremely [rough year]."

That's the frustrating part for Morris as he was finally on the verge of turning his season around. In his last ten starts he was 3-4 with a 3.69 ERA (53.2 IP, 46 H, 33 BB, 50 K), but it was his last two appearances that were really impressive where he was 1-0 with a 0.75 ERA allowing just six hits, five walks with 14 strikeouts in 12.0 innings.

"It is frustrating as I started rolling those last few outings," said Morris. "Hibby (Kinston Pitching Coach Greg Hibbard) and I figured out some really good stuff with my mechanics, and as soon as the second half started everything came together. Of course I tweaked my arm, but the good thing is I feel like even [though] this is the end of the season this year I finished on a good note and have things I can roll with. If I end up pitching in a league this fall I think I can [build on something for next year]."

One thing is for certain, with the Indians recently acquiring so many arms in their July trades and in the draft, pitchers in the system have been put on notice. Morris understands this and knows that next season is one that is shaping up to be a career defining season for him. Avoiding a serious injury to his shoulder was a sigh of relief as a major surgery would have cut into his season next year and likely wiped out that season and seriously hurt his standing in the organization.

"That's why I am glad this was not something serious," said Morris. "I was scared to death it could be something torn. And organizations look at that and if a guy can stay healthy. I think the good thing is they found out it is something I can easily fix, I just have to get my flexibility right and it is not necessarily a bad arm. So once I get the flexibility going it should no longer be a problem."

The goal now for Morris is to get healthy, get back to 100%, and be ready to pitch next year. Along the way this offseason he may also pick up some innings in one of the several fall and winter leagues that are available in the offseason.

"I am sure I am going to talk with [the Indians] to see if I can pitch in a fall league or something to get some innings," said Morris. "I just want to

make sure everything is good for next season as next season is going to be a big season."

A big one indeed.