Things can change quickly in the minor leagues. In the "what have you done for me lately" world of fandom you are only as good as your last season, and as a result a prospect's stock can fluctuate a lot from season to season or even month to month. Take for instance Wes Hodges. Last year at this time many Indians fans viewed him as the future at third base. Just a year later and after an injury riddled season this year at Triple-A Columbus where he hit .269 with 5 HR, 40 RBI and a .704 OPS in 91 games, that outlook among fans has changed dramatically. Tony had a chance to talk to Wes about it this week.

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Last year at this time Hodges was coming off of a sensational campaign in Akron where he hit .290 with 18 HR, 97 RBI and an .820 OPS in 133 games, and a lot of Indians fans viewed him as the future at third base in Cleveland. Just a year later and after an injury riddled season this year at Triple-A Columbus where he hit .269 with 5 HR, 40 RBI and a .704 OPS in 91 games, that outlook among fans has changed dramatically. You would be hard-pressed to find Hodges' name mentioned in the conversation at third base in Cleveland anymore as he has been replaced by the now en vogue Lonnie Chisenhall. In fact, there are many who think the Indians should not even roster Hodges this offseason, something that looked like a foregone conclusion when the 2009 season started six months ago.

But fans should not be so quick to give up on Hodges.

For all those people down about the year Hodges had, remember that a lot of what he went through this year was similar in a lot of ways to what Columbus first baseman/outfielder Jordan Brown went through last year at Triple-A Buffalo. Like Hodges with Akron in 2008, Brown had an MVP season in Akron in 2007 hitting .333 with 11 HR, 76 RBI and a .906 OPS in 127 games. Brown followed up that outstanding season with a very pedestrian output in Buffalo last year where he hit .281 with 7 HR, 51 RBI and a .754 OPS in 109 games.

Much like Hodges did this year, Brown battled through numerous injuries in Buffalo in 2008 which impacted his performance at the plate. After the 2008 season, a lot of people mistakenly jumped ship on Brown too soon, and given a chance to prove himself this past season he responded by winning the International League batting title and hitting .336 with 12 HR, 67 RBI and a .913 OPS in 111 games.

Now, no one is predicting Hodges to come back in 2010 and win a batting title in Columbus, but it is reasonable to expect based on his history as a hitter that if he is healthy he will perform well.

And besides, sometimes guys just have off years. For any successful prospect or big league baseball player, almost every single one of them have had a season where their performance and numbers significantly dropped when compared to their other seasons. It happens to the best of them, and is why when a player has proven over time he can hit you should not give up on them after one bad season. One bad season after being promoted to the next level is certainly cause for concern, but just as you want to prove a good season as legit by having the player put up a strong follow up season, you also need that second poor season in a row before you really begin to question whether a player has plateaued at a certain level.

For Hodges, it was a season to forget and one he was happy to put to rest when it ended a month ago.

"I was disappointed that I did not have a good year," said Hodges in a recent interview. "I guess there is nothing that I can go back and do. I just have to put it behind me and get ready for next year."

While injuries are often a poor excuse, in the case of Hodges they certainly apply as his injuries had a great impact on his season.

He came down with a shoulder injury in late April which affected his throwing so he sat out a few games at the beginning of May and then returned to the lineup as the designated hitter. About a week after returning to the lineup he dislocated a bone in his right wrist (throwing hand) when sliding into second. As a result, the injury forced him to miss almost two months of action as he left Columbus on May 12th and did not return until July 4th. When he did come back, he was relegated to designated hitting duty for about three weeks since he was still not completely recovered from his shoulder and wrist injuries. He finally settled into regular duty at third base at the end of July and played there full time the final six weeks of the season.

But the damage had already been done.

Hodges' wrist was never really 100% the rest of the season, and it affected him in the field and at the plate. A lack of strength and not being completely healthy in his wrist prevented him from turning on anything and he was often late getting the bat head through the zone which led to a lot of weak pop outs the other way in right and right center.

"I [wasn't] really able to do what I am capable of doing," said Hodges. "I [felt] like I was just staying inside on everything and kind of hitting stuff the other way. It was my wrist more than anything and the only motion that hurt was hitting. I just need to get my wrist stronger and healthy this offseason and I will be alright. It is what it is."

Hodges was quick to point out that his struggles were more him getting himself out, and not the level of competition he was facing.

"From what I have seen, I don't feel like Triple-A pitching is any different

from Double-A pitching," said Hodges. "The biggest thing I have seen is they will mix up their timing. The will slide step and things like that to throw you off, but as far as stuff goes there were guys in Double-A who I felt had better stuff."

Not only did the wrist and shoulder injuries have an affect on Hodges' performance at the plate, but they probably had a greater affect on his development at third base where he is still rough around the edges. He has good hands and a strong arm, but has displayed questionable range during his three year career with the Indians. The Indians were encouraged with the strides he made at improving his defense in the Arizona Fall League last year and hoped he could carry that momentum into this season, but things never materialized as they hoped as the injuries prevented him from playing regularly at third base.

Hodges played in 15 games at third base in April, but did not play another game at third base until late July. He did get a few innings in at third base in a short rehab assignment in Lake County in late June, but they were minimal. He played in 35 games at third base the final six weeks of the season, and totaled 50 games at the position for the entire season. For a player needing to improve his defense, that short amount of time and inconsistent work at the position just didn't cut it. With him not being able to play regularly at third base to make the necessary adjustments at the position he now will have to wait until next year to make them.

In the time Hodges was able to play and workout at third base he did learn some things to take with him into the offseason, but he will have to wait until spring training next year to apply them. A full season of good health next year will go a long way at helping him make those much needed strides defensively.

"[Columbus Manager] Torey [Lovullo] definitely helped me and taught me a lot over there [at third base]," said Hodges. "In the offseason I just want to soak in everything he taught me and digest it and apply it next year."

Nothing has been determined yet, but one way to make up for lost time may be to send Hodges to a winter league in the Dominican Republic or Venezuela to play for a month or two full time at third base. But any plans of playing winter ball will have to be put on hold until after his honeymoon as he is getting married to his fiancé Katie on November 14th. He lives in the Atlanta area, so whether he plays winter ball or not he will continue to train at his alma mater Georgia Tech.

"I am just going to do what I did two years ago," said Hodges about his plans for the offseason. "I am getting married, so I will be busy with that. I am just going to get in there and workout like I was able to before last year. I am not worried about [my season], I know if I get healthy and get stronger I will be fine."