It may have been a buzzer beater at the signing deadline in mid-August, but Indians first round pick Alex White out of North Carolina is now 100% the property of the Indians and has since been working out in various places looking to gain some ground that was lost because he signed so late. While out at the Indians Instructional League in Arizona this past week, Tony not only got a chance to see Alex pitch, but also had the opportunity to sit down with him and talk about his transition from college star to prized Indians farmhand.

It felt like Christmas in October seeing 2009 1st rounder Alex White on the mound and pitching for the Indians. It may have been a buzzer beater at the signing deadline in mid-August, but he is now 100% the property of the Indians and has since been working out in various places looking to gain some ground that was lost because he signed so late.

White has gotten a crash course in his short time with the Indians on the organizational philosophies, coaching, facilities, and more. Upon signing the Indians immediately put him on a return to throw program since his last outing was all the way back in early June for North Carolina in the College World Series. They sent him to Double-A Akron for three weeks to use the facilities and staff there to help get him ready to pitch in Instructional League, and at the same time by sending him to Akron it served as an unofficial way to kind of break him into the minor league lifestyle.

"It was great to go to Akron," said White. "That was a great

group of guys and great team to be around. They were playing well when I got there and it was just fun to watch and be a part of it."

White did not stick around with Akron during their championship run in the playoffs. Once the regular season ended he went home for a little over a week before going out to Arizona for the time to participate in Instructional League in mid-September. He is one of the few players who participated in both sessions of Instructional League as he was there all four weeks. Since he did not throw a professional inning this year the Indians wanted to get some long looks at him before shutting him down until next season.

"Things are going really well," said White about being in Arizona. "I am just getting used to everything in Arizona as I have never been out here before. It is a nice area and a nice complex, and I have enjoyed it so far. [Once we are done here] I will just take some time off. They have a throwing program, so I will start throwing again in January and basically just work out and get ready for the long season next year and also put a few pounds on."

White was very good in his final outing of Instructional League on Thursday where he was stretched out to five innings allowing no earned runs (two unearned runs) on five hits, no walks, and had three strikeouts. He threw 60 pitches total in the outing, threw first pitch strikes to 13 of the 21 batters he faced, and topped out at 94 MPH with his fastball.

Now that he is a professional he will throw a lot more than he did in college, though the amount of throwing he is doing in Instructional League is cut back a lot more than it would normally be in spring training and in-season in order to protect his arm.
"I threw a lot in college and threw everyday," said White. "Out here I just make sure I throw everyday and keep prepared for when I am going to pitch. I have pitched maybe twice a week since I have been here which hasn't been too much. I have been building back up and trying to get a few innings under my belt before I shut it down again."

One thing is for certain, the days of 100+ pitches in a game are over for White until he reaches the big leagues. He won't be extended to 130 pitches in an outing like he was in the College World Series this year, and instead will be limited to an 85-95 pitch count for most of his minor league career.

"Yeah, we have pitch counts in college," said White. "Especially early in the season they don't let you get past 80 pitches. As it warms up and you get late in the playoffs you basically tell them how you feel. I always felt like I got better from about 80 pitches on, and I think they knew that. They would run me out there for 120-125 pitches in the World Series, but they certainly wouldn't let me go much past that."

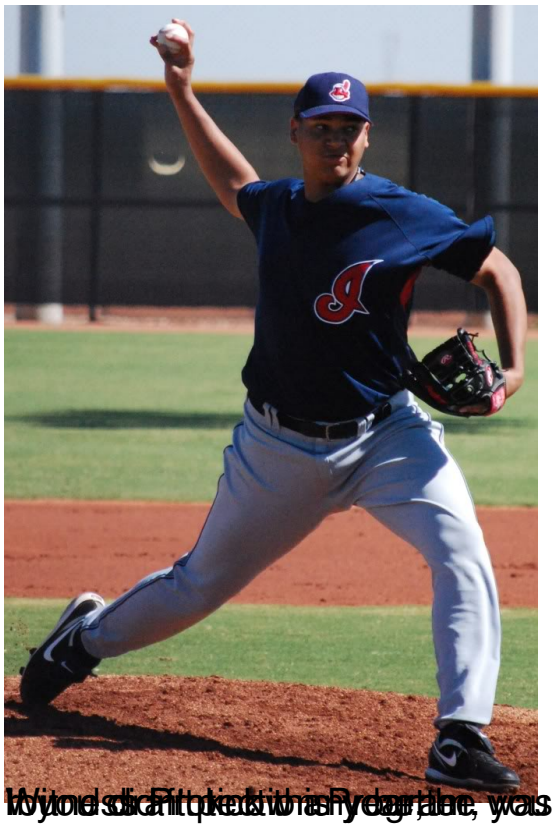
There was talk immediately after the Indians selected White in the draft that he would be converted into a reliever to expedite his way up to the big leagues, but as time wore on (and common sense prevailed) the Indians decided it was best to keep him as a starting pitching option because of his very good three pitch mix. Worst case, they can always use the bullpen as a fallback option if he struggles down the road as a starter.

"Yeah, absolutely right now [I am a starter]," said White. "I have just been preparing for starts and going out there and being ready in the first inning because after the first inning I always start to feel like I get better. But I have to make sure I get ready for the first inning, and that is what I am keying in on right now. We have looked at a couple of other different things. Nothing drastic. Just trying to repeat my delivery and to repeat all four of my pitches throughout the game and throwing them more consistently to both sides of the plate. I am just learning how to pitch again and trying to get the arm back in shape."

When White makes his professional debut next season it is very much expected that he will do so as the opening night starter for advanced Single-A Kinston. Going to Kinston would be a neat kind of homecoming for him as he is from Greenville, NC which is about 20 minutes from Kinston; however, he has bigger aspirations than just pitching in front of the hometown folks in Kinston.

"Kinston is 15-20 minutes from my hometown and a lot of people from Greenville come to see those games," said White. "It will be a lot of fun, though I have a lot higher goals than just Kinston, NC. But if that's where I have to start it will be a lot of fun."

Smokin' Joe Gardner



Wynn's Pitcher Rydgrane, was banished to the dreaps never signed their third

That's what it felt like this year with regard to right-hander Joe Gardner, who after being taken in the 3rd round of the 2009 Draft out of UC-Santa Barbara and signing quickly he was never heard from again this season. He was expected to open the season at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley and be one of the anchors of a strong starting pitching staff, a staff that in the end proved to be outstanding this year even without him there.

As it turns out, Gardner had a right rib cage injury that he suffered at the end of his college season this year. It was an injury that just kind of lingered and he could never really truly get back to 100% the entire summer. So instead of making his professional debut this year and getting some quality work and innings at Mahoning Valley, he in turn got a lot of work on the stationary bikes, treadmills, and weight machines out in Goodyear.

After all that rehab time he logged in the training room, Gardner has since been cleared to throw and was impressive in his limited game action in Instructional

League. In his final outing on Wednesday he was sensational as he threw four perfect innings where he faced 12 batters and set each one down via either a strikeout (six) or groundout. Not one ball was put in play in the air or even as a line drive, and not even a foul ball was hit in the air.

"Things are going good," said an excited Gardner before his final outing of the Instructional League. "I am back, healed, and a 100%."

After an outing like he had on Wednesday, it is certainly very encouraging to see and it makes you wonder what could have been had he not battled with the rib cage injury this summer and been able to pitch for Mahoning Valley. The injury was more precisely diagnosed as a strained right serratus anterior muscle, which is a muscle located in the upper-torso region near the armpit that is largely responsible for the protraction of the shoulder bones. The Indians were aware of the injury when they drafted and signed him, though both the Indians and Gardner did not think it would linger as long as it did.

"[The injury] happened in school during my last start," explained Gardner. "It was a little problem, and I didn't think it would last that long, but I had a few setbacks along the way. I just rehabbed and have been strengthening up everything while I have been here. I feel stronger, and I feel fresh too. I feel like brand new since I have been throwing for the first time in a few months. I'm just ready to be out there and should be ready for spring coming up."

Gardner looked in midseason form on Wednesday with a sinker that topped out at 94 MPH and was darting all over the place. Scouts and coaches from both teams came away very impressed with his outing, and there even a few "wow" looks around the field when his sinker seemingly just fell off a table a few times.

With Instructional League over, Gardner will go home for a few weeks to California and then report to the Indians academy out in Santo Domingo in the Dominican

Republic for their Dominican Developmental League. For the past few years the Indians have sent two to three pitchers from the states to their developmental league in the Dominican Republic to not only get the pitchers some extra work, but also immerse them into the Latin culture and grow a better understanding of it. While out in the Dominican Republic we will continue to work on his four-seam fastball, which is a new pitch just added to his repertoire.

"[We aren't concentrating] on mechanics so much, but we are trying to work on a four-seam as I have always been a two-seam thrower," said Gardner. "I am developing that and I got a little touchy with it [in one of my games here] and kind of threw it over the middle 0-2 which wasn't good. But that's why I am here. I am still working on it and I hope to develop it a lot more this offseason. I am just adding it for more of a fastball away and something to elevate and use as an 0-2 pitch."

When he returns from the Dominican Republic in mid-November, he will get right to work and start to get prepared for the 2010 season.

"I have been set up with a trainer and will probably work out five to six times a week to just get back in shape and stronger," said Gardner. "And I will continue throwing since I did not get to throw a lot the past few months."