For the first time in a long time the Cleveland Indians were participants and not just spectators in the Rule 5 Draft. They awoke from their seven year Rule 5 slumber yesterday to take not only a player in the Major League portion, but they also snatched up outfielder another player later on in the Triple-A phase of the draft as well. The big pickup in the Major League phase was 25-year old right-handed pitcher Hector Ambriz who is an interesting arm they were able to scoop up out of the Arizona Diamondbacks system. Tony tells us all about him in his latest.

For the first time in a long time the Cleveland Indians were participants and not just spectators in the Rule 5 Draft. Going into yesterday's draft the Indians had not selected a player in the Rule 5 Draft since right-hander Neomar Flores from the Astros in the Triple-A phase of the 2004 Draft, and the last player they took in the Major League phase was infielder Travis Chapman seven years ago in the 2002 Draft.

They awoke from their seven year slumber yesterday to take not only a player in the Major League portion, but they also snatched up outfielder another player later on in the Triple-A phase of the draft as well.

The big pickup in the Major League phase was 25-year old right-handed pitcher Hector Ambriz who is an interesting arm they were able to scoop up out of the Arizona Diamondbacks system.

He throws a fastball that sits at 90-94 MPH and has touched 95 MPH, and complements it with a really good splitter which is considered his out pitch.

He is a polished pitcher who is considered a good strike thrower, though there are some concerns with his weight (6'2" 235 pounds).

Ambriz had an okay season statistically in 2009, going 12-11 with a 4.94 ERA in 28 combined starts at Double-A Mobile and Triple-A Reno. In 156.2 innings he allowed 182 hits, but only walked 46 batters while striking out 135.

"Our scouts like his stuff," said Indians Assistant General Manager and Director of Scouting John Mirabelli in a phone interview after the draft yesterday. "He has power pitches and has a very good history going all the way back to college of being a good strike thrower."

The Indians are loaded with internal options in the starting rotation for 2010, so the Indians plan on bringing Ambriz into big league camp in spring training as a candidate for their big league bullpen. It is a role that after a lot of research and discussions with their scouts that the Indians feel may best fit him.

"He has been used exclusively as a starting pitcher in the minor leagues, but our scouts feel like he has a chance to maybe be a little more effective in the bullpen," said Mirabelli.

"So he is going to go to major league camp and compete in that role.

His stuff has a chance to maybe play up in that role.

If you look at his numbers he was in a hitter's league in the PCL and in a hitter friendly ballpark in Reno, so with all of those considerations we think he has a chance to help."

With the move to the bullpen, there may be some thought that Ambriz will focus more on using just his two best pitches in his fastball and splitter, but Mirabelli doesn't think that will be the case as they like his entire arsenal of pitches.

"He also has a slider and a curveball," said Mirabelli. "I think he will mix in all of his pitches. We think his

secondary pitches have a chance to have power to them and we think may have a chance to play up a little bit in a shorter stint out of the bullpen."

The pickup of Ambriz was not something that came out of nowhere. The Indians have some history with him as they got a lot of looks at him back when he was pitching for UCLA the same year the Indians were heavily scouting left-hander David Huff who they eventually took with their supplemental first round pick in the 2006 Draft.

Ambriz would end up being selected by the Diamondbacks in the 5th round that same year.

"Oh yeah, we saw him a few times," said Mirabelli. "I think Huff was the Saturday night starter and Ambriz was the Friday night starter.

So we have a history with him and track record, and I think if you put all those things into the evaluation I think we have a pretty fair idea of what we are getting.

[Rule 5 selections] are long shot gambles and there is not a whole lot of risk involved to us, and we thought this guy presented some things that could help us.

We'll see."

Horwitz Fills Outfield Depth Need

In addition to potentially filling a need in the bullpen with the selection of Ambriz, the Indians also filled another area of need in the outfield at Triple-A Columbus with the pickup of outfielder Brian Horwitz in the Triple-A phase of the draft.

Horwitz, 27, is not much of a prospect or anyone to get excited about from an impact standpoint, but he does serve a purpose as a depth outfield option the system suddenly lacked in the upper levels. He really has no power and is an average runner and defender at best, but his biggest asset is his ability to make contact and hit for a good average. In 2104 career minor league at bats he has only 243 strikeouts, which is an outstanding 9:1 AB/K ratio.

He also owns a career minor league batting average of .317 and a .781 OPS.

When putting together an early depth chart for the Indians minor league system last week I found they lacked a veteran option to use in the Columbus outfield considering Trevor Crowe and Michael Brantley are expected to be with the Indians next year and John Drennen and Nick Weglarz likely open the season by repeating at Double-A Akron.

With only Jose Constanza, Jordan Brown and Stephen Head as the likely everyday options in the Columbus outfield to start the season, the Indians needed another guy to throw into the mix.

I thought it would end up being a free agent signing (which they still may do), but for now Horwitz slides in as that fourth outfielder in Columbus.

"He is a right-handed hitting corner outfielder that provides some insurance and fills a need of ours with a lot of left-handed hitting outfielders," said Mirabelli. "We think he provides some ability with the bat, he is a corner outfielder, a good athlete, and had a little bit of major league time this past year and held his own.

So I think he is a good guy to have at Columbus and see how he develops."

Big Opportunity Awaits Lofgren

While there is much excitement over the Indians pickup of Ambriz, the it was somewhat bittersweet knowing that left-hander Chuck Lofgren is no longer with the Indians after he was taken by the Milwaukee Brewers with the #13 pick in the Major League phase of the draft.

For all Lofgren has been through the last few years, it leaves me with somewhat of an empty feeling knowing that he could potentially realize his dream and make his major league debut with a team other than the Indians. He performance and stock had dipped over the past two seasons for various reasons, but he never quit, battled, and persevered.

That hard work, persistence and dedication paid off for him this year with a nice year and now having the opportunity of a lifetime to live his dream.

According to a Brewers official I talked to after the draft yesterday, they plan to bring him into big league camp this spring with the idea of trying him out as a left-on-left reliever. They have a need for a second lefty in the pen, and they like how effective he was this past season when facing lefties (.179 BAA) and how he has some deception in his delivery which can give

left-handers fits.

Knowing that, the Brewers plan is to use him as a lefty specialist out of the pen where he faces one hitter or if the lineup that inning is a left-handed dominated lineup he would be looked at to get three outs.

He would obviously also be an option as a long man to pitch when the starter was ineffective or to save the bullpen when the game is well in hand.

"I feel honored to be selected by the Milwaukee Brewers," said Lofgren in a text message Thursday evening. "I'm going to come into big league camp on a mission and I won't stop working until I get where I want to be."

Lofgren now sets out on a tough journey where the odds are stacked against him to stick on the Brewers big league roster the entire 2010 season. Somewhere around 80-90% of all Rule 5 picks taken in the Major League phase are returned to their old team near the end of spring training or over the course of the season, so there is a good chance he could return to the Indians at the end of March. But if anyone knows how to battle and beat the odds, it is Lofgren.

Indians Also Lose Meyer, Martinez

In the Triple-A phase of the Rule 5 Draft the Indians lost a couple of left-handed relievers with Matt Meyer going to the St. Louis Cardinals and Anillins Martinez going to the Florida Marlins.

Meyer, 24, is a big 6'4" 220-pound lefty who throws from a sidearm arm slot that can make left-handed hitters uncomfortable when facing him. He sits in the low 90s and has a very good power slider that he has huge confidence in, and gets very good movement on his pitches.

Near the end of the season this year he toyed around with throwing a submarine ball and it has caught on where he is going with it and working on it this offseason.

Two years ago at this time Meyer looked like an up-and-comer as the Indians were excited with his work after Instructional League, but after two disappointing years and an inability to

consistently find the strike zone with his fastball it appears he fell out of favor with the organization considering he was left off the Triple-A reserve list of 38 players. In any case, he now gets a chance with a new organization which sometimes can breath new life and new results from a player, and his new submarine ball may be what he needs to get his career turned around.

Martinez, 22, has spent a lot of time in rookie ball, playing in a full season league all year for the first time this past season (2-3, 3.65 ERA, 36 G, 61.2 IP, 63 H, 30 BB, 53 K). He throws a fastball-slider mix with the fastball clocking in at 87-90 MPH and has topped out as high as 92 MPH.

He is a strong and durable pitcher, so the Marlins picked up some depth for their system.

Nagy Rejoins The Tribe

The announced the rest of their Triple-A Columbus coaching staff yesterday. A little over a week ago they made the announcement that Mike Sarbaugh would make the move from Double-A Akron and become the new manager in Columbus.

Former Indians fan favorite Charles Nagy has reunited with the organization, and will now serve as the pitching coach at Columbus.

Lee May Jr. has also been promoted from Akron to Columbus and will serve as the hitting coach.

Nagy, 42, returns to the Indians once again after his 13-year playing career in the organization ended in 2002. He spent two seasons with the Indians as a Special Assistant to Baseball Operations from 2004-2005 before leaving to join the Los Angeles Angels organization to serve as the pitching coach for their Triple-A affiliate in Salt Lake from 2006-2007.

Indians Announce Minor League Awards

In addition to the Rule 5 Draft and Triple-A Columbus coaching staff announcements, the Indians also announced their minor league season award winners. Catcher Carlos Santana

took home the Lou Boudreau Award as the top minor league position player in their system.

In 130 games at Double-A Akron he hit .290 with 91 runs scored, 30 doubles, 2 triples, 23 home runs, 97 RBI, and .943 OPS.

Right-handed pitcher Hector Rondon took home the Bob Feller Award as the top minor league pitcher in the organization.

In 27 combined games at Akron and Triple-A Columbus, he went 11-10 with a 3.38 ERA (146.1 IP, 143 H, 29 BB, 137 K).

photo courtesy of Dave Nelson, MiLB