One of the biggest strengths in the Cleveland Indians farm system is the depth of talent they have in the outfield.They have high ceiling big league caliber players such as Nick Weglarz and Michael Brantley, and also have others like Jordan Brown and Trevor Crowe who look to be solid complementary big leaguers in the making. One of the more interesting outfield prospects who emerged after a very good season last year is Donnie Webb. Tony sat down to talk with him this past week.

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They have high ceiling big league caliber players such as Nick Weglarz and Michael Brantley, and also have others like Jordan Brown and Trevor Crowe who look to be solid complementary big leaguers in the making. They also have a lot of raw talent lower in the system like Abner Abreu, Bo Greenwell and Delvi Cid, and have a plethora of depth options such as Jose Constanza, Jordan Henry, Tim Fedroff, and John Drennen.

One of the more interesting outfield prospects who emerged after a very good season last year is Donnie Webb. Even though he was a 10th round pick out of Oklahoma State University in 2008 and the Indians paid him a $100K to sign, he sort of flew under the radar coming into last season.

It didn't help that Webb, 23, got off to a horrendous start professionally in 2008 at short-season Mahoning Valley when he hit just .218 with 1 HR, 17 RBI and a .581 OPS in 51 games. He suffered through the typical transition many hitters go

through as they learn to face much better pitching everyday than what they saw in college as well as adjusting to the change from metal bats to wood bats.

"The way your swing is in college, you can get away with a lot of errors because of the metal bat," said Webb in a recent interview. "With the wood bat it really shows how good your swing really is, so that first month in Mahoning Valley I was just struggling. They have that policy where they don't touch you in the first 30 days, and I was struggling and just begging for someone to help me out (laughs). Finally the hitting coach down there [Anthony] Medrano helped me out and [Minor League Hitting Coordinator] Bruce [Fields] came down and helped me out a little bit and I started hitting well. I think I hit .350 at the end of the month, so I was happy at the end of that year how I turned it around and was ready to bring it into [last] year."

Webb was very disappointed in his overall performance that first year in Mahoning Valley, and used it as a learning experience coming into the 2009 season. The strong finish at Mahoning Valley where he hit .365 (23-for-63) his final 18 games also served as a springboard for a breakout season in 2009 where he hit .293 with 7 HR, 63 RBI, 36 stolen bases and .778 OPS in 129 combined games between Single-A Lake County and Triple-A Columbus. He spent most of the season in Lake County (122 games), but received a late season callup to Columbus to help fill an outfield need after Trevor Crowe and Michael Brantley were summoned to Cleveland. While his callup was just as a temporary fill in, he seized the opportunity and impressed hitting .367 (11-for-30) with an .894 OPS in seven games for Columbus.

Overall, it was a very solid first full season for Webb last year and should help give him some momentum for this upcoming season where he will more than likely be in the starting outfield at advanced Single-A Kinston to open the season. The second full season - particularly at Kinston - is a true separator and will say a lot about what kind of prospect he is. While his numbers at Lake County were very good he was also 23 years old almost the entire season which is above the league average of 21.5 for hitters, so his strong showing there should be taken with a grain of salt.

Even so, looking back on his 2009 campaign Webb was satisfied with the strides he made.

"I think I [did] okay making adjustments and everything," said Webb.

"It's been a good experience and I am soaking it up. I think a very big part of this game is making adjustments especially with seeing good pitching everyday, but I think I have done okay so far."

Webb's very good speed combined with a solid two-strike approach and the ability to pound the ball into the gaps makes him an interesting leadoff prospect for the Indians. At 5'11" 190-pounds, he is short and compact and is as hardnosed as they come. One of the more exciting aspects of his game is his ability to stuff a stat sheet. While he has no plus tool offensively, he showed an ability to pile up extra base hits, steal bases, and score a lot of runs when he piled up 21 doubles, 12 triples, and 7 home runs to go along with his 36 stolen bases and 72 runs scored last season. A lot of those doubles and triples were a result of his aggressive, nonstop hustle where he is always looking to take an extra base whenever possible.

"In college I would always stretch singles into doubles because I think I am fast enough to do that," said Webb. "With a double I would always try to stretch it into a triple to get that extra base. It's just something I have always done."

Webb got off to a slow start offensively last year hitting just .244 with a .650 OPS in April, but followed that up with a very good May (.306/.835). He struggled again in June (.247/.699) and July (.207/.574), but then got red hot in August (.420/1.048) and September (.367/.894). His late season surge was the result of all the hard work in the cages with Lake County Hitting Coach Jim Rickon and some of the changes they made to his swing and approach.

"We talked about my hitting approach and what kind of hitter I was, and I was just being way to aggressive at the beginning of the year," said Webb. "I was trying to do too many things. My back shoulder was dropping the barrel head, so Jim really worked on chopping it down and getting my swing level and to top the ball more. I went into the cage for awhile and I just started letting it come to me and some things just started clicking. I worked on the tee a lot and just got into the habit of doing the right thing."

The biggest concern at the moment with Webb is his high strikeout rate, which is something that could present problems for him as he moves up the minor league level and faces more advanced pitching. He is an aggressive swinger so he doesn't draw a lot of walks nor make consistent contact as evidenced by his 117

strikeouts to just 42 walks he totaled last season. There is no doubt that when he connects he makes things happen and is exciting to watch run when the ball hits a gap or goes down the line, but going forward developing and improving his plate discipline is a must.

On the defensive front, Webb has proven to be a very well rounded, versatile outfielder showing good range and instincts to track down balls. His biggest weakness is his fringy arm that is at best average. He mostly played center field in Lake County last year, though when Delvi Cid was called up in early June he mostly played left and right field the rest of the season. At this point his versatility to play any outfield position to go along with his good speed profiles him best as a fourth outfielder in the big leagues, but that can always change.

"I played center until Delvi Cid came up, and then I played left and right," said Webb. "When Bo [Greenwell] came up he played left and I played mostly right and rotated some. I played center in college, so I feel I can play anywhere. I think I have an average arm as what a lot of coaches have been telling me is that I have an average arm with above average accuracy."

Webb is an Oklahoma guy in every way possible. He was born in Stillwater, Oklahoma and has lived there all his life going to high school and college there and currently still resides there. Stillwater is also the home of the Oklahoma State University Cowboys, a university and team he grew up loving and dreamed of one day going to school and playing baseball for. He was a redshirt junior when he was drafted and signed by the Indians, and while it was tough to leave his Cowboy hat behind in Stillwater he was ready to get his pro career started and has never looked back or regretted the decision to leave.

"I always wanted to be a Cowboy," said Webb. "I actually went to a Division-II school and then I transferred there. My mom worked for OSU at the time, so the head coach there was pretty good friends with her. I was kind of an invited walk on and didn't get a scholarship, but they offered me a scholarship when I left. I am just happy [to be with the Indians] and was ready to get out and start in pro ball."